

*Includes EcoTax

Winter

Number 132

June - August 2005

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— SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND PLANET CARE —

EARTH GARDEN

— FOR BUSH OR CITY ALTERNATIVES —

Farm Plan Plus Vision Grows Organic Apples

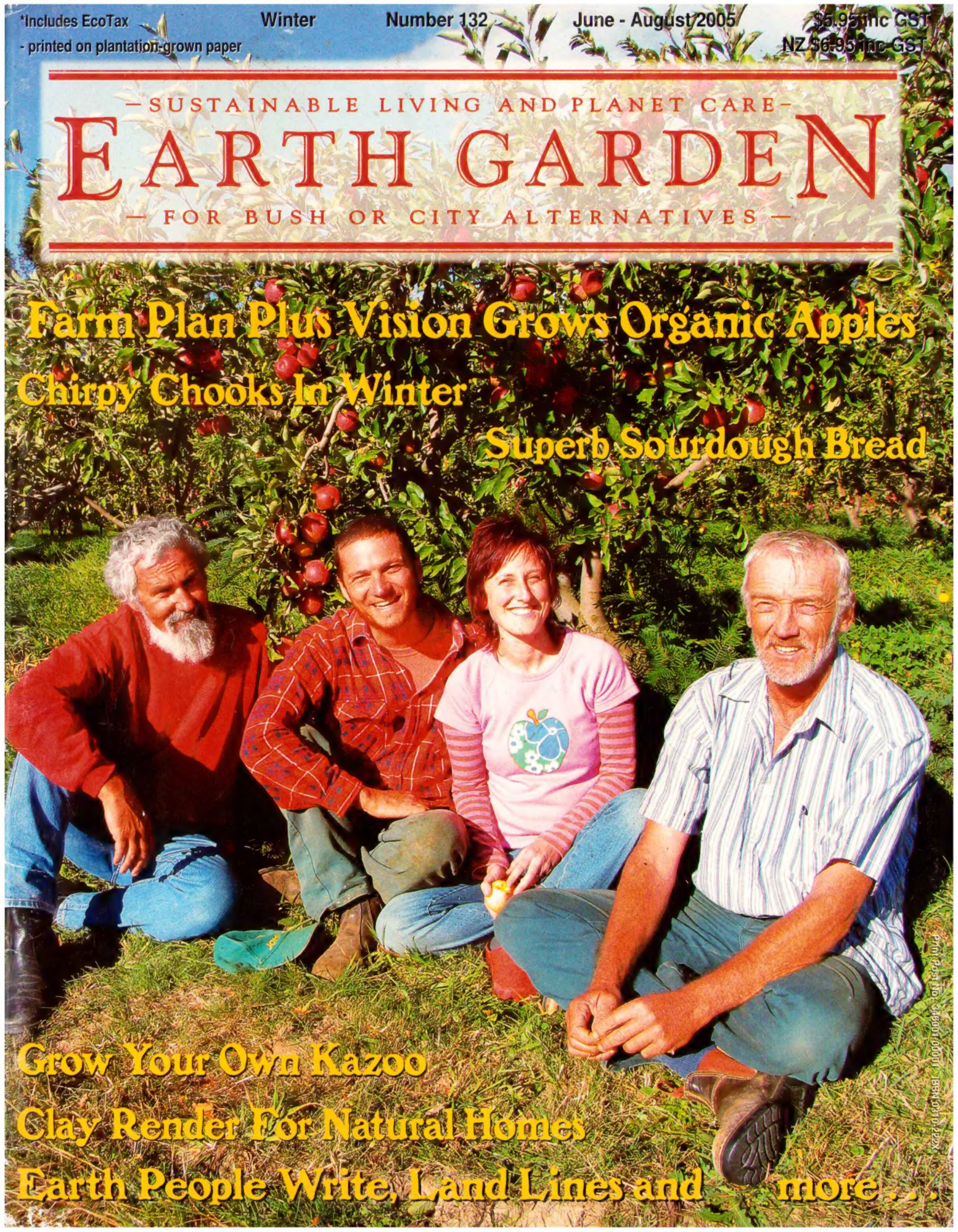
Chirpy Chooks In Winter

Superb Sourdough Bread

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Earth People Write, Land Lines and more . . .



THE Good Life

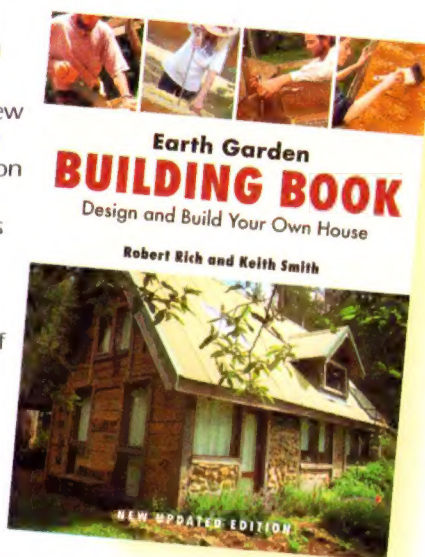
THE BOOK CLUB FOR SIMPLER, HEALTHIER, GREENER LIFESTYLES

ISSUE FIFTEEN

AUTUMN & WINTER

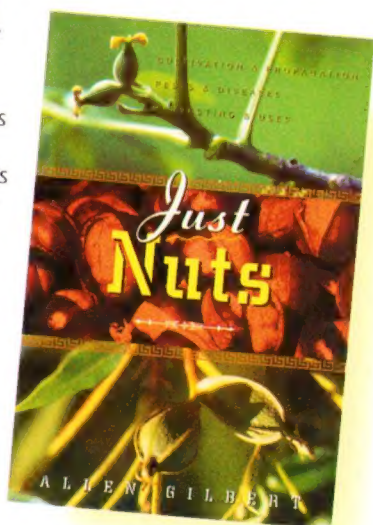
Earth Garden Building Book by Bob Rich and Keith Smith \$49.95 inc GST

Here it is — the long-awaited brand new edition of the all-time classic Australian owner builder's bible. A new chapter on strawbale building by John Glassford accompanies the revisions and updates by 'Earth Garden' magazine's long-standing mudsmith, Bob Rich, and founding 'Earth Garden' co-publisher, Keith Smith. For the many hundreds of 'Earth Garden' readers who've sought this book since the previous edition went out of print a couple of years ago, the long wait is over now. Learn how to design and build your own natural home from mudbrick, stone, timber or strawbale. Includes mountains of practical building advice, techniques, sources, and encouragement. 328 pages.



Just Nuts Allen Gilbert \$26.95 inc GST

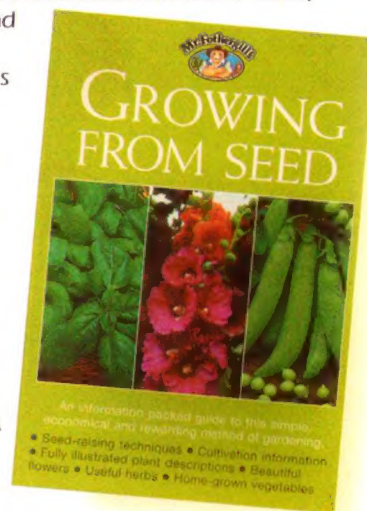
One of Australia's most experienced garden writers, Allen has put together a very practical new colour paperback guide to growing all kinds of nut trees. Allen's self-sufficient lifestyle on Bruny Island gives him the perfect chance to 'road-test' all his advice in his own garden, so you get the benefit of what works and what doesn't. Whether for a hobby farm, backyard or commercial operation, this book will answer all the nutty questions, and give you the confidence to tackle cultivating, pruning, budding, grafting, harvesting and all the wonderful uses for homegrown nuts. 140 pages.



SUSTAINABLE LIVING ■ ORGANIC GARDENING
PERMACULTURE ■ NATURAL BUILDING
HEALTHY CUISINE ■ ADVENTURE TRAVEL
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ■ ANIMALS
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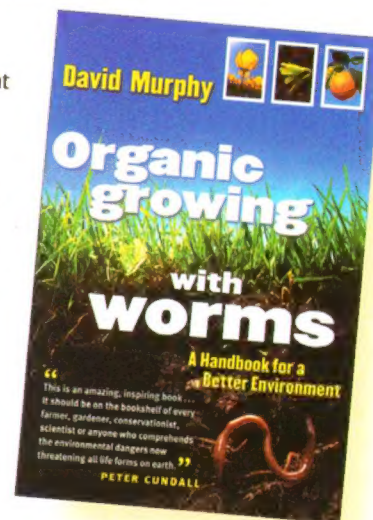
Growing From Seed \$19.95 \$16.95 inc GST

This is a great little full colour guide to seed raising techniques, and cultivation advice for herbs, vegetables and flowers. The colour detail is excellent, the advice is practical and this is the perfect guide to help you get the greatest rewards and economy from organic gardening. A planting chart for cool, warm or tropical climates helps round a very useful book. 160 pages.



Organic Growing With Worms David Murphy \$35.00 inc GST

Earth Gardeners know that the humble earth worm can do more than its fair share around the garden and farm. This new book from an experienced worm farmer shows exactly how to maximise their effectiveness. The book covers how to introduce worms to your soil, how to create an instant garden bed, recycle household waste, build your own 'wormery', set up a waste management system and much more. Everything you ever wanted to know about worms but were afraid to ask. 244 pages.



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TO RECEIVE YOUR FREE CATALOGUE OR TO ORDER

Front Cover: Growing organic apples! Kate Ulman and Brendan Eisner (centre) are working with farm planners, surveyors and contractors, Dave Griffiths (right) and Konrad Ensor (left) to produce a 20 year plan for their thriving organic apple farm in central Victoria. See page ten for more.

—SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND PLANET CARE—
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Back Cover: Well-known author, Scot Gardner, is also well known for poking fun at himself—he once played the bagpipes and the didgeridoo on Channel 9's 'Red Faces'. Here he displays the latest in 'gourd fashion accessories' and (at bottom) his fabulous Gourd trumpet mbira kazoo — all grown and made by his good hand. See Scot's article starting on page 52 on how to grow and make your own kazoo.

EcoTax: This issue's EcoTax will go to The Wilderness Society to help the 'Gunns 20' environmentalists who are being sued by the giant woodchip company, Gunns. Gunns allege 'conspiracy, defamation, and interference with trade and business' by the environmentalists against the company, and are seeking damages totalling \$6.3 million. The 'Gunns 20' are vigorously defending the writ and donations to support them can be made via The Wilderness Society by phoning 1800 030 641.



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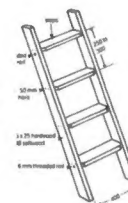
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Founded by Keith & Irene Smith, 1972.

EARTH GARDEN is Australia's original journal of sustainable living and alternatives. It is a forum of practical ideas, shared knowledge, sources and a guide to alternatives to high-consumption lifestyles.

It's about putting a roof over your head, growing your own food organically, aiming for appropriate, renewable home energy systems and surviving — and thriving — in the city or the bush, with the inner changes which follow when you're in harmony with Nature.

EcoTax: each issue we donate a portion of the cover price to a community group involved in conservation or social justice projects to help balance the use of the partly recycled paper used for printing *Earth Garden*. We would like to see all publishers pay an EcoTax.

Earth Garden is produced in an office running on Powercor's EcoSaver Green power, and is printed on paper made from plantation-grown timber.

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Contributions to *Earth Garden* are welcome: sharing information and experiences with other readers strengthens the network of Earth Gardeners. Photos and illustrations are important. Please write first with your story idea. Subscribers are sustainers: for subscription details see page 80.

We welcome advertisements appropriate to the aims and ideals of *Earth Garden*, but reserve the right to refuse ads at our discretion. Contact us for display rates.

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(We don't have the resources to staff telephone enquiries: please write or fax.)

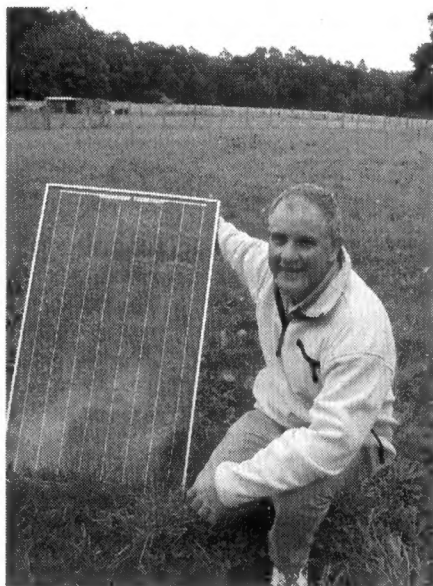


Beyond The Bitumen

Dear readers,

Welcome to the winter issue of *Earth Garden*. It's an exciting time around our office at the moment, because after 13 years in our draughty old falling-to-bits Victorian office, we're building a strawbale, solar grid-connected office up the road. We've all pitched in with designing the office, after many years to each contemplate what we dislike about the old office. Drawing up a 'hate list' is a great way to help you leave an old home too! We'll be having lime-rendered strawbale walls, a 1500 watt grid-connected solar power system with mains back-up, and an energy-efficient office layout.

We're hoping to move in by the end of



Earth Garden editor, Alan T Gray, with a BP Solar photovoltaic panel similar to the type being installed on the roof of the new strawbale Earth Garden office, which is being built in the paddock behind him.

August — well, some of us are hoping we'll be in by then. I have a \$50 bet with our Advertising Manager, Doug Falconer, who says there's "no way" we'll have a functioning office by 31 August. Over the past three months since the first stake was driven into the ground on the site, my hopes of winning the bet have seen-sawed. I've been very confident until now, but just lately I've started to worry that when the autumn break arrives, and the weather turns wet 24/7, that it may take many months for our wall render to dry.

At 750 metres above sea level in Trentham, and with incredibly long, wet winters, the walls will need all the winter warmth they can find to dry in time for us to get the office useable by spring.

Doug professes to be quite happy to lose his bet if it means that he gets a new, eco-friendly office to work in, but that's just his typical Scottish bravado - he HATES losing a bet — I know from past experience, but that's another story that I won't embarrass him with. Well, not now anyway: I may need that story for later in the year.

For now, it's back to cutting and shaping strawbales to go around timber posts, and dividing and retying strawbales with bale pins — it's such good fun, and to be able to help build your own Green office is truly a big buzz.

I hope you enjoy all the sustainable living stories in this winter issue — keep warm as you read this issue and ponder some great projects to sink your fangs into, and I'll be back with more exciting building news in spring.

Happy reading,

Alan



Earth People Write is an open forum. The views expressed in letters from readers do not necessarily reflect the opinions of *Earth Garden*. Letters are always welcome, but please keep them concise. This issue we're giving away to our favorite letter writer a copy of *The Earth Garden Building Book*.

Pickled olive dangers

Dear 'Earth Garden',

I was a little concerned to read the article by Fran de Luce in the Autumn issue of *Earth Garden*. Fran recommends adding 'dill or garlic to taste' to the olives prior to storage. People should be very careful if adding fresh herbs and particularly garlic to anything that is stored for long periods. While Fran recommends storage in a brine/vinegar combination which should have a preservative effect, if people store their olives in a solution below a certain concentration of salt and/or vinegar, the garlic can become quite dangerous. I understand that almost all deaths from food poisoning caused by 'off' pickled olives in the US have been attributed to having been stored with fresh garlic.

It is also not necessary. If the olives are a little too salty when ready to eat, they can be left in fresh water overnight and then tossed in a marinade of fresh herbs and enjoyed almost immediately as olives pick up the flavours very quickly — the herbs and garlic will taste better fresh and you will not run the risk of food poisoning from incorrectly stored herbs and garlic.

Barbara Levick, email: barbara@belwoodgrove.com.au.

Send chook book quick

Dear friends at 'Earth Garden' & the Book Club,

Thanks for the back copies of *Earth Garden* (Fireside Special) — great reading. Fabulous advice and tips. My kids wanted to know why I'd bought a bunch of 'old books' — mind you my kids are fabulous recyclers and wonderful advocates for sustainable living and animal rights. Could you please send me *Jackie French's Chook Book*? I finally found a small rainwater tank at the local recycle centre for \$30!

I'm going to turn it into a termite resistant chook shed. Thought it all out, keeping it cool and warm, predators, and so on. I got some great ideas from older copies of EG. Anyway, I was chatting to a patient at work who's very knowledgeable about poultry, and I've landed myself some free bantams. Well lovely folk... hope all's well in your world. Thanks so much for the lovely magazine and all the information shared with readers.

Sue Oberthur, Burpengary, Qld.

EG housesitting a popular idea

Dear 'Earth Garden',

Thank you for this fantastic resource, your magazine and book club. You're a veritable wealth of information. Thank you for helping me get my long cherished dream up and running with these wonderful books to continue my research. I appreciate your magazine enormously! It is truly wonderful to know there are other like-minded people out there, making a difference. I have international friends who are very interested in housesitting and would like to see more opportunities to do this with like-minded EG people.

Jenny Lamb, PO Box 97, Austinmer, NSW, 2515.

Food dryer requirement

Dear Earth Gardeners,

Recently I moved from the city to this delightful area. In 14 months I have renovated this house and planted a small orchard of eight different fruit trees plus vegies. I need advice (and encouragement) as I want to proceed towards sustainability, with a solar house, half of my food requirements, as well as a chook run. Does anyone know where I could purchase an electric food dryer with the heating system on the side, not the bottom? Previous EG

editions mention 'Nara' and 'Ezidri' units. I would love to hear from fellow Earth Gardeners with an interest in permaculture and sustainability from the Sydney/Il-lawarra/Shoalhaven areas. Please write initially to introduce yourselves and your interest.

'Poet', 4 Yawang St, Berkeley, NSW, 2506.

Giant flour bags

Anyone trying to get the giant flour bags offered by Claire, in 'Earth People Write', in the previous edition of 'Earth Garden' may have experienced difficulty with the email address. The correct address is claire@casadellapasta.com, there is no 'au' on the end.

Ecological co-living

Dear 'Earth Garden',

Within the next 20 to 40 years the global energy and hence economic system as we know it is likely to have radically changed. What happens when we can't so easily mosey on down to our 'not so local' shops, or regular workplace and primary school? How can we realistically grow a wide range of our own food? Will we be able to run our chainsaws on vegie oil? Within 20 years, I believe that we will need to learn how to survive by living a simple and highly subsistent lifestyle. I propose that if anyone's interested we pool our resources and skills and 'use' the current system to develop a socially and ecologically sustainable living situation. The process might include: finding families or individuals to form a team to further thrash out these ideas; searching for suitable property to develop a sustainable eco-village. Is anyone out there interested? If so please let me know.

Tim O'Donnell, phone (03) 5962 5778, e-mail: tim@mooramoor.org.au.

Hobart or Daylesford readers?*Dear Earth Gardeners,*

First I would like to say how much I enjoy your magazine and look forward to every issue. I've recently moved back to the city so my two year old son can be closer to his immediate family. I'm originally from Sydney but have lived in northern NSW and Queensland for 18 years. Moving around a lot and never really feeling settled, I have often thought of moving to Victoria (Daylesford area) or Tasmania (Hobart region) and wondered if any of your readers would like to write and tell me about their special communities. I'm looking for an idea of like-minded people, non-judgemental and good community spirit. I'm 46 years old, single and would like to hear from men and women. Look forward to hearing from you.

Linda, 8/95 Alfred Street, Ramsgate, NSW, 2217.

Education program supported*Greetings from Alwar,*

After my article was published in *Earth Garden* 125, Maddy Atkinson from Preston, Australia sent us a packet of art material which we used in two workshops for children and in the 20 day Teachers Training Program. Thanks to Maddy Atkinson and *Earth Garden*. The teachers' training was conducted in Shyam-shah forest retreat. There was lots of fun and activity. After the program the teachers did a door to door survey and PLA in 22 Nat and Kanjar villages and wrote a Need Assessment report for each village.

Based on the reports I am writing a proposal for an alternative education program for the Nat and Kanjar community. These communities are traditionally into prostitution. We have identified 12 highly sensitive villages where we wish to open primary schools if some funding agency decides to give us a grant or if 12 concerned individuals decide to support one school each.

Nirvana Bodhisattva alwartiger@rediffmail.com.

Pickle barrel sources*Hello,*

My partner is very interested in creating our own compost tumbler as described in EG 127 but we really have no idea where to source a pickle barrel or two. If anyone can assist please email. Many thanks and cheers to all.

Linda Hardingham, lindaembs@bigpond.com.

Happy customer*Hi all,*

I ordered a couple of books this Mon-

day just gone, when I spoke to a delightful young chap, can't remember his name, but he's a credit to your organisation (name starts with an 'A'?). Anyway, just wanted to let you know. The books arrived in time for Christmas- yah! (Wed 22 December), and I'm very happy with both books. Now we've just gotta build the eco- friendly house — egads — next year! Thank you so much,
Shelley Steele, WA.

Gee . . . thanks mum . . . the cheque's in the mail!

—Alan.

Suspicious US water-saving*Dear 'Earth Garden',*

Just wanted to say congrats on *The New Hard Times Handbook*. I lived in Victoria for quite a long time and acquired the first handbook then. I have used it to the point of wearing out. The knitted hat pattern is my one and only.

The Earth Garden Water Book looks interesting. I lived in Victoria during a drought and the Victorian government issued booklets on saving water. I used the ideas when I came to the States. One day I had a visit from the water company. They thought I was stealing water and wanted to know why my bill wasn't as high as my neighbours'. I explained about Australia, water, and so on. I offered to show them the Victorian booklets. They were not interested. As a parting shot I told them I could use more water if they wanted. No comment. I still continue to be careful with my water and just laugh at my experience. Keep up the good work with the mag.

Margie Dal.

Carob powder: pods only*G'day Alan and all,*

At last, we have escaped from the madness of the US and are safely back home in NZ — thank goodness! And in EG 130 (on page 4) Joanne Cause writes about 'carob beans'. My understanding is that carob powder (the carob we use in food and drinks) is made from the pod with the seeds removed. The beans (seeds) are sometimes processed to make a commercial gum/thickener. Remove the beans from the pods, then lightly roast the pods (mostly to dry them thoroughly) and grind them to a powder. Enjoy! Best regards to all,

Bob Jones & family, Waitohue Orchards, Broadwood, New Zealand, email: waitohue.orchards@iname.com.

Natural paint recipes?*Dear 'Earth Garden',*

I would like to make my own non-toxic paint and I'm wondering if you have any information or can point me to the right issue of *Earth Garden* or someone local who's done

it. I have a recipe for lime-based paint, however if you ever want to paint over it, it has to be lime-based again or the paint won't adhere.

Any help would be appreciated.

Max Nunn, email: paulnunn@netconnect.com.au.

Dear Max,

Doug Falconer has written excellent articles about making your own natural paint in EGs 121, 122 and 123.

—Alan.

Co-operative land buying leads?*Hi EG,*

Looking for information on starting a community or buying land with a group of friends. Can you give me any leads? Cheers,

Kylie, email: trobertson@naturelinks.com.au.

Better mouse trap ideas*Hi EG,*

Thanks for the reminder. I look forward to each new issue. Here are two ideas for environmentally friendly mouse traps. Using an old fashioned metal mop bucket with rollers: put peanut butter or butter on the rollers and about six inches of water in the bucket. Lean a stick against the bucket so mice can get to the yummys. The mice roll off the rollers into the drink and drown. I know it's cruel but in times of mice plagues, it's a way of catching many at a time.

Secondly, lie a wine bottle on its side with the neck sloping down (place the bottle on a stump or something similar). Place a bucket under the neck of the wine bottle with about 15 cm (six inches) of water. Stick a piece of cheese into the neck of the bottle and peanut butter or oil on the neck: same result — the mice fall in the water and drown. The mice can be left out for the birds to eat because there's no poison.

Stephanie Stevens, Kumbia, Qld.

Calling all knights, damsel in distress!*Dear 'Earth Garden',*

Can anyone help me? My house, on 18 acres, was being renovated. There is heaps of stuff still to do and I can't sell the house or do it myself. Nor do I have the finances to pay tradespeople. My elderly father lives with me and I am his carer. I need any tradesmen or handy-men who would like a working holiday

on the mid North Coast, 20 minutes from Port Macquarie, to perhaps come and stay with full bed and board to do some work to help me? I'm a good cook.

The grounds also need bulldozing and sorting out, and believe it or not, I have a bobcat, excavator and bulldozer, so again, if anyone is able to use them and would like a working holiday, can you help? I am sinking fast.

Damsel (name and address supplied), email: Holtonlodge@aol.com.

WA strawbale supplies?

Dear sirl/madam,

I am looking for organisations and contact numbers for either a branch of your organisation or anyone else who can help with supplying a house from small square strawbales in WA. I'm looking for any information at all: supply, prices, and so on. Any help would be appreciated.

George Lavender, RMB 519, Williams, WA, 6391.

Dear George,

Try contacting: *Sharron Baker & Rudy Stoffel, PO Box 637, Toodyay, WA, 6566; Gary Dorn, Strawbale Constructions, 65 Auckland St, North Perth, 6006 (08) 9443 5159, 0419 042 265, garydorn@eepo.com.au; Susan Swan, Architectural Design Studio, phone (08) 9316 3042; and the 'Earth Garden' website strawbale forum at: www.earthgarden.com.au.*

—Alan.

Arhae peas?

Dear editor,

On pages 38 and 39 of EG 101 was an article called 'Starting on empty with drought gardening' by Joy del Castillo, of Eidsvold in Queensland. She referred in the article to arhae peas. Are you able to help? What are they? How do I get seeds? Thanking you in anticipation.

Ian Simons, Helidon, Qld.

'Wild neighbours in dry times'

Dear editor,

I so enjoyed reading the above article in EG 130 (page ten), because it was the first article I have read where someone is living in circumstances similar to myself. I have a strawbale cottage 40 km east of Glen Innes, NSW, close to Washpool National Park. I have just finished rendering the cottage, having spent August to November 2004 in a tent while I built.

I deliberately built my cottage without plumbing, preferring to access water via bucket either directly from the tank or from the beautiful Glen Elgan Creek that runs

through my land. I shower in the open using a bucket of water and a fruit tin with holes punched in the bottom and a wire handle. I have three 'shower roses' — one fast flow, one medium and one slow flow — depending upon the size of the nail I used to make the holes!

I wash up beside my showering place and all my used water goes into the newly established garden beds. Unfortunately my 'animal proof' vegetable garden was not greater glider and possum proof — their front paws being able to get through the mesh and remove young plants. Only the herb garden remains in tact now. I have instead commenced a 'no dig' garden cum compost bed which will be ready (and well guarded) for the next growing season.

I have a rock, fire out back and I wash clothes in a bucket. Drinking and cooking water is brought in by bucket each day. I am using a metho burner when it is too wet for the outside fire, and a slow combustion stove is on order for this winter (our minimums here sit between -8° and -13°C). The strawbale walls are wonderful insulators against summer heat and winter winds and give the added bonus of that special earth energy all around me.

I have a long drop dunny out back with some worms in it, and I regularly add a little lime and a layer of straw and eucalypt leaves to assist with the breakdown process. We have recently emerged from three years of drought across the New England Tablelands. All is green now and the creeks swept clean and running furiously. How I love my slice of heaven on this bounteous earth.

I am a doctor of zoology, recently graduated at the young age of 49 years, and seeking employment. I specialise in parasitology, environmental ecology, wildlife rehabilitation and diseases and aquatic snails. Many thanks for a wonderful magazine, I have been reading since its inception.

Mahri Koch, Dove Cottage, Lot 3, Morven Road, via Glen Innes, NSW, 2370.

Muscadine grapes?

Dear 'Earth Garden',

I am interested in muscadine grapes, EG 125, page 58, and wondered if you could advise me where to obtain seed. Also do you have any books, or can you get any books on organic potting mixes? We are starting a food plants/bush foods nursery and don't want to use commercial mixes.

John Mauger, Bairnsdale, Victoria, phone (03) 5152 6324/5153 0090, fax (03) 5152 6391.

Dear John,

The article author, Joe, has advised that Muscadine (v. *rotundifolia*) can be obtained through: *J L Hudson, Seedsman, Star Route 2, Box 337, La Honda, California 94020-9733, USA <http://www.jlhudsonseeds.net/> They accept \$AUD notes, and are a trusted and reliable supplier dealing in ethnobotanical and heritage seeds of all kinds. Maybe try ORGAA (Organic Growers Association) phone 1800 356 299, PO Box 12852, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000, for advice on potting mixes.*

—Alan.

Pickling supplies?

Dear folks,

Good afternoon, I wonder if you can help me. I am a keen self sufficiency buff, rotating four garden beds, and I make beer, wine, cure meats and so on. I have recently planted cucumbers for pickling and while I have the recipes, I cannot get my hands on all of the ingredients. Can you possibly help me? Would you know if there is a shop or retail outlet that specialises in all of the bits and pieces for the self sustainer? I live in the Melbourne western suburb Caroline Springs (love your magazine). If you can help me that would be appreciated, if not keep up the good work.

Michael Bauermeister, phone (03) 8698 8001, fax (03) 8696 8198, email: michael.bauermeister@langhamhotels.com.

Dear Michael,

Readers may contact you with better advice, but perhaps try wine making supply shops — they often seem to have the right gear for larger scale pickling jobs.

—Alan

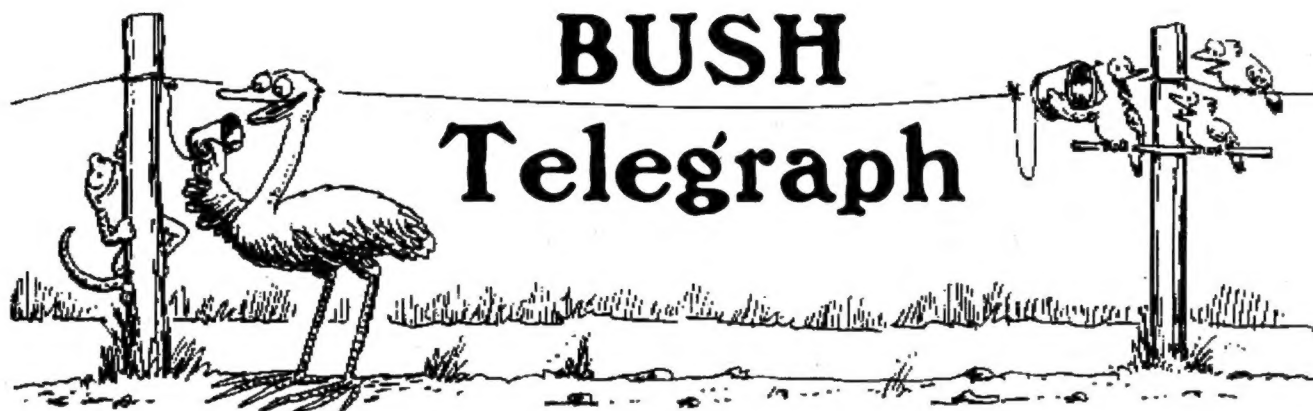
EcoTax well received

Dear 'Earth Garden',

On behalf of the Refugee Action Collective of Victoria, I write to extend our sincere thanks to all at *Earth Garden* for the generous donation made through the EG 130 EcoTax. With our Baxter 2005 Convergence just a couple of weeks away now (Easter), your valuable contribution could not have been more timely.

Gillian Davy, Treasurer, RAC Victoria, PO Box 578, Carlton South, Victoria, 3053.

Earth People Write continues on page 68



Any news items which may interest Earth Gardeners may be submitted to *Bush Telegraph*. Please send notice of meetings, festivals and gatherings well in advance of the events.

Press Council backs Greens complaint 1

The Australian Press Council has upheld a complaint by Senator Bob Brown against *The Herald Sun*, Melbourne, for an article headed "Greens back illegal drugs" published on 31 August 2004 in the lead-up to the 2004 federal election. The Council views this article as irresponsible journalism. In the article a number of false claims were made about Greens Party policies. The article was accompanied by a graphic entitled "What they stand for". The graphic listed 20 broad proposals claimed to be advocated by the Greens. Sen. Brown said a number of claims made by the paper in the article or graphic were wrong, including:

- an alleged policy of a 33% hike in company tax to at least 49 cents in the dollar (which did not reflect current Greens policy);
- suggestions that people would be forced to ride bicycles more often and eat less meat, and that business people would be forced to use alternatives such as rail, boat and teleconferencing (no coercion is advocated in the policies);
- the existence of policies to keep out business immigrants, introduce taxes on family homes, drive farmers from their land and reduce infrastructure to 1995 levels (no such policies exist, Senator Brown says); and
- a desire to cut the population by 2 million (Senator Brown says there is no such policy and the claim is based on a Liberal Party paper).

Additionally, regarding the headline on the article, Senator Brown said that it was "manifestly wrong" and that Greens policy was a call for "a study of options". Given the sweeping and unqualified nature of the claims, the newspaper ought to have checked the veracity and currency of the policy claims. Prior to the publication of the article, the reporter rang Senator Brown's

office asking for the Greens' policies. He was informed "that all current policies were available on the website". There is evidence that, as well as any use made of the Party's website in writing the article, the reporter preferred other statements of Greens' policies, some erroneous and hostile to the Greens. In the context of an approaching election, the potential damage was considerable. The actual electoral impact cannot be known but readers were seriously misled. On the day of publication, Senator Brown addressed his concerns with the article to the bylined journalist during a press conference, but no redress was forthcoming. In fact, a follow-up article, published the next day, was described by Senator Brown as "derogatory".

An article by Senator Brown, which responded to some points in the 31 August article, as well as comments by Treasurer Costello in a subsequent article, was published by the paper a month later. The claims made in the original article were seriously inaccurate and breached the Council's guiding principles of checking the accuracy of what is reported, taking prompt measures to counter the effects of harmfully inaccurate reporting, ensuring that the facts are not distorted, and being fair and balanced in reports on matters of public concern.

Press Council rejects appeal 2

The Australian Press Council has dismissed an appeal from the *Herald Sun* concerning its page three news article of 31 August last year that attacked the Greens during the federal election campaign. The Press Council has upheld its ruling that found the article by Gerard McManus to be "irresponsible journalism" which "seriously misled" readers and damaged the Greens. The Greens will be writing to the Liberal Party which continues to publish and spread discredited information from the *Herald*

Sun article. *The Herald Sun* is now obliged under Press Council rules to publish the original adjudication in its newspaper. "This was a disgraceful article which fabricated and attributed policies to the Greens which did not exist. It misled thousands of voters on their way to the ballot box," said Green Senator Bob Brown. "Such journalism undermines democracy," he said.

Diploma of Agriculture in organic farming

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) and the Organic Agriculture Association are again offering a Diploma of Agriculture in organic agricultural systems in 2005. This is the only such course in Australia. It won the Organic Federation of Australia Best Organic Education Project in 2003. The diploma course will be available both full and part time in Bairnsdale. Units from the course can also be taken part time in Drouin. Intensive short courses are run periodically around Victoria. Distance education will be available soon. The diploma course comprises ten units which cover all aspects of organic farming. On completion participants will be able to plan and manage an organic farm. The course is designed particularly for farmers and small holders, but is also suitable for gardeners and those providing organic services and inputs. There are no prerequisites. The course provides people with an understanding of the sound organic principles and standards that form the basis for organic certification. Soil structure and fertility management is the key upon which all aspects of organic farming depend. The course is based on the principles of soil mineral balance as developed by William Albrecht. The ten units that make up the course are:

- Organic soil management
- Whole farm planning
- Pest, disease and weed management

Certification and conversion
Livestock production
Plant propagation
Crop production planning
Sourcing information
Farm business planning
Promoting change in agriculture

Classes in Bairnsdale are conducted at the Organic Information and Resource Centre from 9.30 am to 3.30 pm. Full time students will attend three days a week. The Centre has its own library with an excellent collection of organic books and magazines. Drouin classes are at the Baw Baw Health and Community Care Centre.

Short courses and distance education

The Organic Agriculture Association also conducts short courses run over six days in various locations in Victoria with funding from Farmbis or other sources. Before the end of 2005 it is anticipated that some units of the course will be available by distance education. Please ask to be put on the mailing list for notice of these courses.

For further information and enrolment details contact: Organic Information and Resource Centre PO Box 1263, Bairnsdale 3875. Phone: (03) 5152 2276. Email: egoaa@hotmail.net.au.

Youngsters stay indoors, survey finds

Australian primary schoolchildren on average spend just ten percent of free time playing outdoors when at home, a study has found. The national Newspoll survey of almost 500 parents with children aged ten or younger showed one in 20 admitted that when their children were at home, they never played outside. They were likely to spend their free time watching TV or playing computer games. Their experience is a far cry from their parents' generation when childhood was often spent playing cricket in the backyard, catching butterflies or making mud pies. Six in ten parents in the study said that, as children, they spent more time playing outdoors getting dirty than their own children. The survey, for a brand of laundry powder, revealed parents were concerned about their children's safety but were also worried about cleaning up their children's mess. —AAP

Harvest forms building blocks for hemp house

Secrecy surrounds the harvest of a hemp crop destined to be turned into two houses on the New South Wales north coast. Harvesting is about to get underway. Around 2.5 million plants will be used to

build what is believed to be the first hemp houses in Australia. The project organiser Doctor Keith Bolton says hemp is already being used in Europe. "France is making hundreds of hemp houses each year," he said. "England is starting to produce many and it looks like the hemp house industry is happening there. It's not a new product — the Egyptians used to seal their tombs with hemp." The hemp will be ground down to a powder and mixed with lime to create a concrete-like substance. It will then be poured into a formwork where the mix will set, similar to a rammed-earth building.



McLibel pair win payout in David v Goliath case

Two campaigners found to have distributed a leaflet in the mid-1980s libelling the McDonald's fast food chain were denied their rights to free speech and a fair hearing, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled. The British Government was ordered to pay compensation of 24,000 pounds sterling (\$A57,800) to Helen Steel, 39, and David Morris, 50, plus 32,500 pounds sterling legal costs. The environmental campaigners became known as the "McLibel Two" when they defended themselves in a 313-day defamation hearing from 1994 to 1996, the longest trial in English legal history. The ruling in their favour by the Strasbourg judges on Tuesday was a "milestone for free speech", said Keir Starmer, QC, who represented them in their claim against the Government.

"Until now, only the rich and famous have been able to defend themselves against libel writs," he said. "Now ordinary people can participate much more effectively in public debate without the fear of being bankrupted." Seven judges found that the denial of legal aid to the defendants "deprived them of the opportunity to present their case effectively and contributed to an unacceptable inequality of arms with

McDonald's". As a result, the Government will have to make public money available to people accused of libel who cannot otherwise defend themselves, provided their means are modest and their case is sound. Legal aid was not available for libel at the time of the case. The law was changed in 2000 to allow funding in exceptional cases. Only one such application has been granted and that case was settled out of court. It is arguable that individuals who believe they have been defamed by wealthy organisations, such as newspapers, may also be entitled to legal aid on the strength of the ruling.

Telegraph, London.

Good vibrations rule the termite's world

Australian scientists may have discovered a chemical-free way to protect homes from termites. CSIRO researchers have discovered that termites listen to their food using their legs and antennae before tucking into a tasty portion of window sill or support beam. Certain vibrations reveal if other termites are already feeding, in which case the trespassers will move on to avoid starting a deadly turf war. The vibrations are silent to the human ear. Dr Theodore Evans hopes by recreating these vibrations and broadcasting them into the foundations of a house it will scare the pests away.

"It will mean peace of mind for the house owner, and we will have a cleaner environment for our families and our children and our pets to live in," he said. He says the broadcast device can be as simple as the technology used in singing greeting cards.



Show recorded messages you really are important to them

When Seth Shepsle goes to Starbucks, he orders "medium" because "grande" — as the coffee company calls the size between big and small — annoys him. Meg Daniel presses

zero whenever she hears a computerised operator on the telephone so that she can talk to a real person. "Just because they want a computer to handle me doesn't mean I have to play along," she said. When subscription cards fall from magazines Andrew Kirk is reading, he stacks them in a pile. At the end of each month, he puts them in the mail but leaves them blank so that the advertiser is forced to pay the business reply postage without gaining a new subscriber.

Life can involve big hardships, like being fired or smashing up your car. There is only so much you can do about them. But far more prevalent, and perhaps in the long run just as insidious, are life's many little annoyances. These you can do something about. To examine the little weapons people use for everyday survival is like being handed a free guidebook on getting by. It is a case study in human inventiveness, with occasional juvenile and petty passages, but plenty of tips for others who have struggled with the grande-versus-medium conundrum.

And the originators of these tips are happy to share them. "They're an integral part of how people cope," said James Scott, who teaches anthropology and political science at Yale University, and wrote *Weapons of the Weak* about the feigned ignorance, boot-dragging and other techniques Malaysian peasants used to avoid cooperating with the arrival of new technology in the 1970s. "All societies have them but they're successful only to the extent that they avoid open confrontation."

Wesley Williams spent more than a year exacting his revenge against the senders of junk mail. When signing up for a no-junk-mail list failed to stem the flow, he resorted to writing at the top of each unwanted item: "Not at this address. Return to sender." But the mail kept coming because the envelopes had "or current resident" on them, obligating mail carriers to deliver it, he said.

Next, he began stuffing the mail into the "business reply" envelope and sending it back so that the mailer would have to pay the postage. "That wasn't exacting a heavy enough cost from them for bothering me," said Mr Williams, 35, a science teacher who lives in Melrose, New York. After checking with a postal officer about the legality of stepping up his efforts, he began cutting up magazines, heavy bond paper, and small strips of sheet metal and stuffing them into the business reply envelopes that came with the junk packages. "You wouldn't believe how heavy I got some of these envelopes to

weigh," said Mr Williams, who added that he saw an immediate drop in the amount of junk mail arriving. A spokesman for the US Postal Service said the actions sounded legal, as long as the envelope was properly sealed. Most people adopt this sort of behaviour on some level, Mr Scott said, adding that his own habit was to write England rather than United Kingdom on letters to his British friend.

He described this as his way of disregarding British claims to Wales and Scotland. "As a tactic, it doesn't amount to much except a way to provide a tiny and private sense of satisfaction," he said.

New York Times

Toads get a caning

Cane toads, which have enjoyed an untrammelled run in northern Queensland, may have met their match, the ABC reported recently. The seven-cm Dahl's aquatic frog eats toads and tadpoles and is apparently immune to cane toad venom. FrogWatch coordinator Graeme Sawyer has kept five of the frogs in a terrarium for two months. "They've been eating cane toads merrily the whole time," he said. Two cane toads have been found outside Darwin recently and are expected in great numbers in the coming wet season. Sawyer said numbers could be controlled through traps, toad musters and egg and tadpole removal.



Playground equipment arsenic ban

Arsenic-treated wood used for decking and playground equipment was banned on 15 March 2005 – raising questions about the safety of children coming into contact with existing structures. The national chemicals regulator said it could not be confident that arsenic-treated timber was safe for children aged three to five, and ordered the timber industry to stop using

the treatment for garden furniture, picnic tables, park seating, play equipment, patio decking and handrails by March next year. It renewed warnings about the dangerous practice of burning treated timber. But the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority stopped short of calling for existing equipment and decking to be removed, saying that was a matter for State governments.

Copper chrome arsenate is a treatment used mostly on pine to prevent damage from insects, wood rot and fungus. The authority initiated a review of its use after new information indicated that cancer-causing chemical residues could be transferred to humans. Of particular concern were small children, who are more likely to put their hands in their mouths. "We are not able to be confident that it is safe and that alone is enough to cause us to act to stop future uses," said the authority's principal scientist, David Loschke. He said authorities in the US and Europe had made similar decisions about arsenic-treated timber, also stopping short of removing existing structures.

"We are supplying our reports to all relevant State departments and making it known that we are not able to be confident these uses are safe," Dr Loschke said. It was up to them to decide what to do next. He said people with arsenic-treated decking at home would have to make their own decisions. A family without small children could decide it was not an issue for them. The Victorian Government said it would consider the report. The authority said arsenic-treated pine could still be used for telegraph poles and fence posts, which are not often touched.

It found the environmental risks of the timber were low if disposed of in a properly lined landfill. Campaigners for action on treated timber welcomed the authority's report, but were disappointed it did not recommend the removal of structures. Conservationist Keith Loveridge, a campaigner on the topic, said the authority should have gone further. "If they have decided it is not safe for future structures, it is not safe for structures that are already there," he said.

Produce Alert: Gembrook Sustainable Market

Environmentally-friendly sustainable monthly market commences Sunday 28 August 2005. 9 am – 1 pm, Gembrook, Victoria. Enquiries (03) 5968 1011.

She's (Organic) Apples

A young family committed to organic farming takes over the reins of an old apple farm in central Victoria, and, with the help of experienced sustainable farm planners and tree planting contractors, they're heading for a bright future.

by Alan T Gray
Trentham, Victoria.

"IT CHOSE US," says Kate Ulman, bluntly, about how she and her partner, Brendan Eisner, ended up with their 22 hectare (55 acre) organic apple farm and patch of native forest, hidden away at Muskvale in a low valley just south of the central Victorian town of Daylesford. Their picturesque farm is only a couple of minutes from town yet feels like it's tucked away in the middle of nowhere. The couple had searched far and wide throughout Australia, looking for that elusive, perfect *Earth Garden* property.

"When we met we knew we wanted to move to the country," says Brendan. They wrote to *Earth Garden* eight years ago asking readers for suggestions and now, four years after buying their farm, they are not only in love with it, but passionately developing its potential to grow organic apples.

Being close to Daylesford — with its strong sense of community — was a big plus, and the farm stacked up well with the other points on the couple's list. They wanted running water — a seasonal creek just scrapes in here; they wanted a house "because we wanted to be farmers, not builders," says Brendan; they wanted good soil; 20 to 40 hectares; and they wanted to be close to family in Melbourne. Everything about the place was perfect — except that they couldn't afford it. After hurdling this problem with the help of supportive family, Kate and Brendan, with their two young children Indigo (four) and Jarrah (18 months) haven't looked back.

The farm was already certified organic with NASAA. And acquiring the orchard of 15 years old trees, plus all the farm machinery and equipment of a working farm meant they are "ten years ahead of where we'd be if we'd started with a bare paddock," says Brendan.

Vision

Kate and Brendan have a very clear vision of where they want their farm to be in ten years from now. In fact they have two 'ten year plans' in mind for the property. In

the first ten years they want to turn their farm into a model of self-sustaining, biological farming. In the second ten year period they want to use their farm as an educational tool, and to show people how it's done. The couple also want to produce top quality food at an affordable price, grown with love.

Proper planning is essential with such goals, so to help them achieve this they've hired Dave Griffiths from 'Geometree' and Konrad Ensor from 'A Land Shape' to manage many of the farm planning, earthwork, tree planting and design projects. Dave Griffiths has been helping property owners in southern Australia from Kangaroo Island, and right throughout southern Australia and the Pacific, with his vast experience of tree planting projects from olives to forestry, apples and more, while Konrad has many years experience in designing and performing major earthworks to turn unproductive land into free draining, productive farms. Both men work with the landscape and the local environment to maximise the performance of the land while enhancing its sustainability. Many *Earth Gardeners* will know of Dave's work from the article in EG 120.

Brendan was already familiar with whole farm planning ideas before hiring Dave and Konrad. He has also worked at the CERES park in Brunswick, Melbourne, on the ATA's Education Program, teaching widely about waste wise practices and renewable energy.

"I hit it off straight away with Dave. He understood what I wanted to do," says Brendan. For the first few years on the farm, Brendan studied as much as possible about farm planning, and read widely. Then he was ready to contact Dave and Konrad.

Dave says: "Any land owner has to feel comfortable with the farm planner they engage. Farm planners should know the climate, be accessible, and walk the land. On a place like this, you need a bit of time to see what happens in a whole season. My job is really project management — pulling it all together. It's a combination of Konrad's and my experience," says Dave.

Konrad, who has prepared a total contour survey of the entire farm, began by discussing with Kate and Brendan what they wanted. "We've got a commitment to



Dave, Konrad, Brendan and Kate sitting on the lush clover grass between the rows of their established apple trees. When Kate and Brendan first arrived there were deep wheel ruts and compacted soil instead of grass between the rows.

walking this walk,” says Konrad. There were problems with wet paddocks in one part of the farm, complicated by dry paddocks in another part. Good drainage was not only imperative for the apples, but vital for the forthcoming shop at the farm gate. A lot of Konrad’s work involves calculating the best directions for water flows and drainage.

“Konrad can make water go wherever he wants it,” says Dave.

Says Konrad: “You have to design what you’ll do with the water first. Nothing else will work if the water drainage and flows are not fixed first. We’re all partners in this project because Dave and I take a certain amount of ‘ownership’. We want to see successful projects. We could come in, hand clients a plan and do it all in two weeks and be gone — silly. Our approach is ongoing — they’ll never get rid of us”.

Dave says: “We want to do shelter belt trees across the front and forestry windbreaks along the south boundary. I hope to continue to have a relationship with Brendan and Kate. I want to be here when the shop opens and I want to get my apples here!”

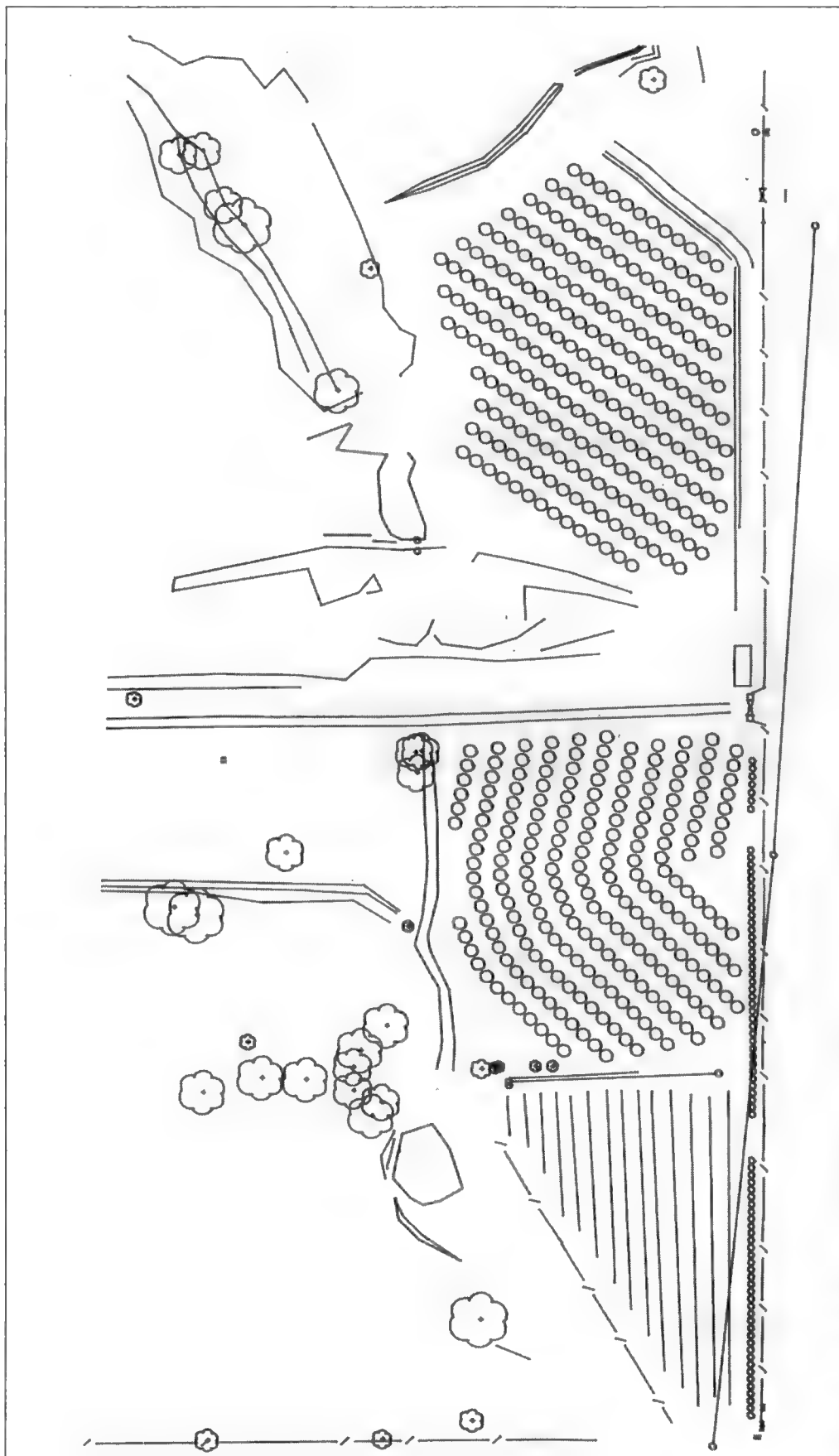
Brendan says: “They planted some trees recently and the other day I saw Dave’s car — he just turned up unannounced and was checking on the trees. That’s so rare

— normally you have to ring people four times. I’m very happy with how it’s going working with Dave and Konrad. After lots of convincing by Konrad I now see how it will all work,” says Brendan.

Apples

Brendan has a general knowledge of farming but knew nothing about farming apples when he started out a few years ago. There are 320 existing apple trees on the farm, and another 420 will be planted this winter, after extensive soil preparation by Dave, based on earthworks designed by Konrad.

The new apple trees were all supplied by Clive Winnmill from Badger’s Keep, the legendary home of lovingly-grown, heritage variety apples in Central Victoria (phone/fax (03) 5472 3338). Brendan and Kate chose 48 old-fashioned apple varieties to complement the existing seven varieties. The new apples are a breathtaking slice of apple history and geography, ranging from the Catshead, Golden Harvey, and Isaac Newton’s Tree (from England in 1600), the Cox’s Orange Pippin (England, 1825), the Bulmer’s Norman (France, 1900) and 20 Ounce (USA, 1844) to the Macintosh (Canada, 1811), Blenheim Orange (England, 1740) Gravenstein (Italy, 1667) and many more.



Kate and Brendan's farm began with a sketch but has now progressed to a detailed contour survey with exact positioning of individual apple trees and wind breaks.

The apples have been chosen for three reasons: variety, diversity and flowering times. There is a month's variation in the flowering times of these new varieties so if the orchard is hit by a big frost, some will always survive. By 2007-08 Kate and Brendan hope to be producing 30 to 40 tonnes of apples.

Kate and Brendan won't store their apples: they only sell them freshly picked. At the moment the couple visit farmers' markets throughout Victoria every week to sell their apples direct. They get a buzz from the reaction of people at the markets who try a small sample: "I love watching people who swipe a quick sample as they walk past, take a bite, then swivel their head around and stop dead in their tracks, as if to say 'What was that!'," says Brendan.

Organically grown, freshly picked Cox's Orange Pippin apples are something to ignite the taste buds of even the most jaded fast food junkie, let alone aficionados tired of the poor choice of apples in most fruit shops or supermarkets.

Soil biology

Brendan is keen to maximise the health of the farm's soil and is a fan of William Albrecht's soil testing system. The soil in the existing orchard was badly compacted and deep wheel ruts from the tractors meant no grass would grow between the rows. Today there is lush green grass thanks to Brendan's soil approach.

The Albrecht system is a holistic approach to soil testing: it doesn't simply focus on the traditional NPK deficiencies or try to correct such imbalances without first looking at all the trace elements in the soil and the way they interact with each other.

Every mineral input will affect every other mineral so you can't just whack in a pile of lime and hope for the best. The Albrecht system is tailored to suit each property, and Brendan has been helped in his soil testing regimes by well-known Albrecht agronomist, Gwyn Jones.

The whole farm has been deep ripped with a Yeoman's plough (see page 61 of EG 130) and this is a key part of the whole approach to managing the farm's soil. Brendan says there are three elements to his approach to managing the farm's soil: structure, chemistry and biology. Deep ripping with the Yeoman's plough helps the soil structure, the Albrecht soil testing system is vital for the soil chemistry, and healthy soil biology flows from the first two in conjunction with biodynamic farming.

The apple trees are obviously healthy and whereas many commercial apple farmers spray their trees with chemicals every week, Brendan only needs to use a copper spray once a year. He also 'feeds' his trees with a seaweed and fish emulsion spray.

The 420 trees waiting to be planted this winter — four metres apart with six metres between rows — will be going into well-prepared soil and should produce fruit for 80 years. Now that's long term planning.

• Dave Griffiths can be contacted by phoning 0418 591 267 or writing to PO Box 116 Maldon, Victoria, 3463.

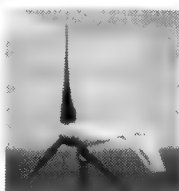
• Daylesford Organics are certified by NASAA. Visit their website at: www.daylesfordorganics.com, email: info@daylesfordorganics.com. RMB 1520 Muskvale, Victoria, 3461, phone (03) 5348 1706.

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– ROLL YOUR OWN –

Sourdough Bread

Good bread – one that has substance and flavour – is often hard to come by, and when you do find it, it fetches a hefty price. However, Catherine shows how easy healthy, delicious and cheap bread is to make – and on top of that you get a great smelling kitchen!

by Catherine James
Richmond, Victoria.

THE ONLY thing better than the smell of freshly baked bread is the knowledge that you've made it yourself. There are lots of different ways to make bread, but one of the most satisfying is sourdough, which is made using the natural yeasts all around us. To capture these yeasts you will need to make a starter.

Starter recipe

1/2 cup of flour (100% stoneground organic wholemeal is excellent)

1/4 cup warm water (not chlorinated – if in doubt, boil and cool to lukewarm)

Begin by mixing the flour and water in a glass measuring jug and then place some muslin on top – this allows air movement but avoids dust settling on it. Place the mixture on top of the fridge for a couple of days.

After this time, it will probably develop a greyish layer on top. Remove this with a spoon and “feed” your starter by stirring in 1/4 cup of flour and enough warm water to get a consistency like thick porridge.

Leave that mixture again for 12 to 24 hours or so. After this time it should have developed lots of little bubbles. When the bubbles are uniformly spread throughout, it's really active. If you catch it when it's like this – excellent! If the bubbles come and go you can reactivate it by feeding it again. The more you go through this feeding process the stronger and tastier your starter will become.

The bubbles are the yeasts having a good feast on the glucose molecules in the starchy part of the flour and this process (otherwise known as fermentation) produces the sourdough starter. The carbon dioxide given off during fermentation is what enables the bread to rise.

The process of fermentation has been eliminated from most commercially-made breads, because the time involved in letting the dough sit is not financially viable. But for the home sourdough bread maker there are significant health benefits. Interestingly, the calcium and starches found in wheat are normally not absorbed by the human

system, but they are in sourdough bread. If the bread is made without additives a wide spectrum of the B group vitamins, especially B12, also become available.

So now that we've got a nutritious sourdough starter happening, let's make some bread! The following are roughly the proportions I use to make two loaves:

1. 2 cups starter
2. 3 cups warm water (1 cup boiling and 2 cups cold give about the right temperature)
3. 8 cups flour (A mix of white and wholemeal is good)
4. 1 level dessertspoon celtic sea salt

Method

1. Dissolve the salt in the water. (I mix it all up in a 6 litre plastic container with a lid)
2. Add the starter and stir to combine – you'll still have a few lumps.
3. Add 4 cups flour (start with wholemeal if you're doing a combination) and stir.
4. Add the rest of the flour and knead with your hands to combine.

I've had dough that has been everything from sticky to smoothly supple to rubbery in this first stage of kneading. It depends on where the starter is at, the moisture content of the flour, how generous I am with the salt etc., but it all works out in the end. Do avoid adding too much flour (too much is more than a cup) and knead for as long as practical. I've kneaded for as long as ten minutes and as little as two and it doesn't make that much difference.

Once you've finished kneading put the dough back into the container (you don't need to wash it out) and lightly sprinkle with flour. Place the lid lightly on top and leave in a warmish place. On average it will take about four to six hours to rise. The cooler the weather the longer it takes, but the more intense the flavour.

When it's itching to get out of the container, it's time to punch down and knead again. The dough should feel more homogenous this time as the gluten will have had time to develop into the strands that will hold your bread together. This is also the fun stage where you can decide what sort of bread to make. Will it be sultana and walnut



or olive and parsley, plain or spicy peanut? Adding a good splodge of oil also helps the bread to stay a bit fresher longer.

At this stage you also need to keep aside a handful of dough. Sprinkle the bottom of the measuring jug with salt and place the dough on top, then sprinkle with flour. This will keep at room temperature and become your starter for the next batch. When it comes time to make more bread, you will need to remove the crust and feed it 12 or so hours before you're ready to use it. It should smell yeasty – if not, discard and start again.

OK, time to place the dough in tins or shape on a tray and leave to rise again. My favourite thing to do is leave them at this stage overnight and then get up an hour early, put the bread in the oven (set to 200°C) and go back to bed. One hour later the bread will be ready and we enjoy fresh nutritious bread for breakie and indeed the kitchen does smell fantastic!

• Thanks to Mark Dymiotis on whose method and recipe this is based.

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Living In Fowl Times

by Alanna Moore

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<info@earthgarden.com.au>.**



HELLO chookies. Wintertime in chook land again. Are your feathered friends warm enough? A few biscuits of straw laid out on their roof may provide useful insulation. A change in diet can give extra heating too. Corn/maize is a good warming food that should be given in greater amounts. (Never feed it alone or cystine deficiency may occur.)

After autumn moulting has ended the annual growing of your birds' new feathers requires increased amounts of protein. Linseed meal cooked up can be a useful addition to diet, at no more than five per cent. Sunflower seeds are good for feather growing too.

You may be lucky and have birds who are good winter layers. As egg laying is linked to daylight length, if you live in the southern parts of Australasia the winter days are shorter than in the north, and hens may stop laying. You might want to trick them into laying more by providing more light at night in their pen, giving them about 14 hours a day. By artificially increasing daylight hours more eggs will result. (So much animal behaviour is triggered by light affecting hormone levels.)

Or you might be generous and give your hens a well-deserved rest over winter and let them build up their reserves ready for the frenzy of spring laying. They will no doubt live longer and be healthier for having a break. Nature, after all, comes in cycles and is not a production line!

New to chooks

Hi Alanna,

Hope you can help me. I've got five Lohman girls and they've been great layers. Having chooks is still fairly new for me and I wonder if there's an allround good info book or whatever to make sure I'm not letting them down with their basic needs.

They get lots of fresh fruit and vegie scraps and I alternate bags of organic food – mixed grain or laying mash. I have only just recently heard about their need of shell grit and I have had some in their pen for about two weeks now.

We had been getting quite a few eggs with runny whites – the eggs are great otherwise although there was also the odd one with a soft shell. I have recently started using a bug eater which attracts and drowns mosquitos etc. (as you see I'm not a Buddhist) which I give to the girls ... they love them!!

Thanks in advance, Lorelei Adams.

Dear Lorelei

It sounds like you are doing the right thing for your girls. The mossies are a good idea! I've never heard of runny whites, but, and as you say – the eggs are great anyway. Soft shells are common with hens new to laying, so I'd say you have nothing much to worry about. Check out my book *Backyard Poultry – Naturally* for more natural living fowl tips.

Rooster with limp

Dear Alanna,

About a month ago one of our four-month-old Wyandotte chickens developed a limp and within two days had died. There appeared to be no other symptoms apart from some loss of feathers which was also common to the other two chicks.

About four days ago the rooster (chick's father) also developed a limp in his left leg which seemed to be appreciably worse to the extent that he sits most of the time, though still seems eager to feed.

Do you have any suggestions?

Regards, Moya Graham.

Dear Moya,

A chick with paralysis can't easily get to the feed tray, so no wonder that it died. The competition from the others would have been too much. Likewise with the rooster, keep him separated if he's out of sorts or the others may pick on him and bully him away from feed.

Have you inspected his foot? Perhaps it's just "bumble foot" which is a puncture wound with a staphylococcal infection; you can massage it and disinfect with calendula tincture if so. Otherwise it could be the more difficult to treat Marek's disease, also known as Fowl Paralysis. Or perhaps it's a problem of aspergillosis (sometimes called brooder pneumonia) which is associated with mouldy sawdust or hay in the fowl house litter. Or it could be infectious (viral) arthritis ...

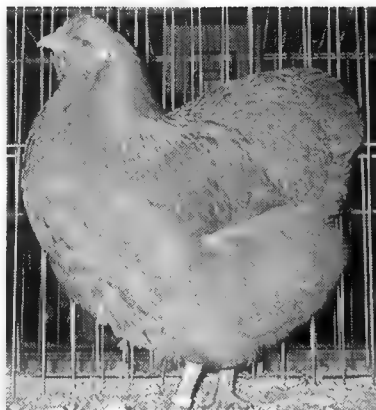
As I have written before – it is almost impossible to do a long range assessment from your (typically) sketchy description. Plus I am unqualified to give health diagnosis or prognosis. But I'm happy to suggest ways to keep birds healthy.

A basic approach, if there is a health problem, is for:

- isolation (and quarantining of new birds is essential



Buff Columbian Wyandotte chick.



Buff Wyandotte.



Columbian Wyandotte rooster.

for maintaining flock health)

- careful examination
- attention to hygiene
- tonic and/or cleansing foods, such as herbs and garlic, added to meals
- lots of TLC.

Stop that Crowing

Dear Earth Garden,

I read with interest Pam Mathieson's letter to Alanna Moore in EG 129, asking about "anti-crowing tricks".

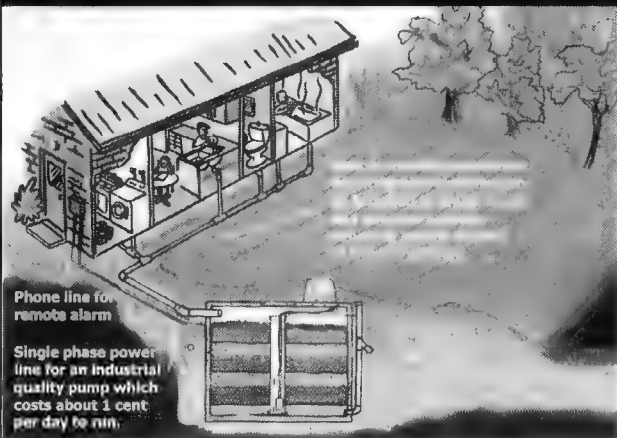
It was suggested to me that we put our rooster under a flowerpot each night. As the sun rises earlier and earlier, our rooster started crowing at 4am.

My children get our rooster (usually when it's dark and he's settled for the night) and put him under the pot with two bricks on top. Our rooster, "Autumn" lets out an occasional muffled crow, but nothing like he does without the pot.

I'm not sure if it works because he can't lift his head to crow, or whether it's dark and he thinks it's still the middle of the night. Hope this helps.

Regards, Linda Cassar, Bacchus March, Victoria.

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Dear Linda,

Gosh! – going to pot has suddenly taken on a whole new meaning....

I don't know what Animal Liberation would think of all this. I assume Autumn can breathe under that pot; perhaps it is raised up on legs a bit to let air in? I suppose it's better than him going into a cooking pot ...

Many people consider keeping roosters not worth the nuisance value, considering their gutsy dawn (plus all other hours) outbursts. In the past they were not so maligned and enjoyed much greater status.

That the rooster is a herald of the light made them something of a sacred creature to early Christian Europeans, who depicted a crowing cock on church weathervanes everywhere. One of the sacred 12 animals in the Chinese 60-year cycle, the rooster has long been held in high esteem in many cultures for it's noble qualities.

Roosters can be absolute gentlemen of great generosity; they can bring peace and social cohesion to a flock of hens; they will fight to the death to defend their kind ... (and they can be brilliant, flash, cheeky buggers!).

A rooster does not have to see the light to go off crowing. He might have no good reason whatsoever to crow, though the light of a full moon might certainly stimulate his lungs. Keeping a rooster in suburbia in a dark place with a low ceiling, such as inside a cupboard, or a special box with a ceiling that can be lowered down after the roosters have perched and are sleeping – is the more usual method of licking the problem.

Council taboos against keeping roosters might be circumvented this way. If you are lucky and only live on the fringe of suburbia or beyond, your neighbours may all have animals too and may not complain about crowing, so you can get away with it. Then all you need are some good earplugs.

We've got to learn to live with roosters if we are to continue their ancient association with humankind. It's hard to imagine our world without the fowl fraternity, without the special place they have in our language. Without chooks no one would ever be cocky, nobody would ever get their hackles up or be crestfallen and no chicks would ever go broody.

How goes your Year of the Rooster?

Cabbage moth deterrent

Dear Alan, Harry and readers,

I thought you may be interested in my method of deterring those pesky white cabbage moths.

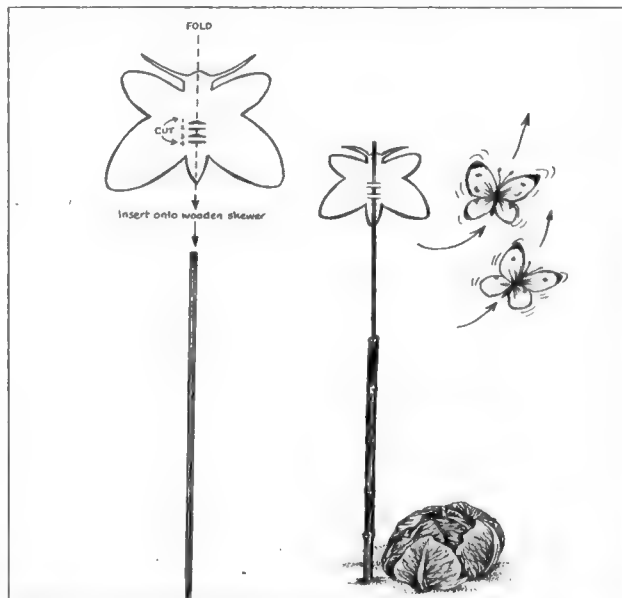
Made from white plastic milk bottles, when placed around the vegetable garden, they really do seem to work.

I find the skewer stick fits neatly into the top of the thin bamboo plant stakes. I cut them out free hand and bend them into a more lifelike shape.

I hope they do the trick for you – but not at the expense of the whip cracking practice.

Lyn, Emerald, Victoria.

The scaremoth. Lyn's tip for keeping cabbage moths away.



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A composting toilet for heavy duty

Many people don't realise that these days you can have an approved composting toilet on any type of house floor – even a concrete slab. The Excel, from Nature Nature Loo.

Long considered the standard in composting toilet performance, the Excel is the preferred self-contained electric model for heavy or residential use. Composting speed and capacity on this model is outstanding! The large Bio-drum designed into the Excel gives it twice the capacity of the Compact.

The Excel was first introduced in 1977, and has been continuously improved ever since. The current model is the fourth generation Excel. The Excel has been successfully tested by the National Sanitation Foundation for six months continuously at its maximum residential capacity of four adults. Key criteria were that the unit operated odourlessly, and produced clean dry compost.

The 50 mm vent is attached at the top rear of the unit and can be installed invisibly by running it through the wall and up the outside wall. For comfort the Excel has a detachable footrest which can be removed to pull out the finishing drawer.

Although the Excel can normally evaporate all liquids, a 12 mm internal diameter emergency drain is fitted at the rear and this should be connected if heavy or residential use, or prolonged power outages are expected.

The most important advantages of self-contained units are:

- Being waterless, they need no plumbing or water connection. This means they are quick and easy to install since the only task is to assemble the vent stack which comes with the unit.
- They are more economical than central units because there is no separate toilet.



The Excel composting toilet comes with a vent stack.

- They are more suited to winter operations than central units, because it is often easier to keep the bathroom warm.
- Most units evaporate all liquids in seasonal operation.
- Since the whole waste stream is recycled, approvals are not normally required.
- Cleaning is simple. All self-contained units have a bowl liner beneath the seat, which can be removed for cleaning whenever necessary.
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- **The Excel is available from Nature Loo, phone (07) 3870 5037.**



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Uncommon Fruits & Vegies

EG founder Keith Smith continues his regular column on the history and cultivation of varieties you may not find at your supermarket.



A bunch of onions – thank shallot!

by Keith Smith
Artarmon, NSW

KNOW your onions? Well, here's a bunch of less common members of the *Allium* family suited to cool-to-warm temperate climates.

Some types produce their bulbs at the top of the stems and some under the ground at the roots, while others just bunch happily together. All are perennials, easy to grow and yield heavily.

Bunching onions

(*Allium fistulosum*)

Bunching onions, with edible tops, green leaves and long white stalks, but which do not form bulbs, have been the favourite onions in Chinese and Japanese gardens since prehistoric times. Although they originated in central and western China, one member, the Welsh onion, was introduced to western Europe in Medieval times from Siberia. The name probably came from the Old English *waelisc*, meaning foreign. In France they are called *ciboules*.

These herbaceous perennials are cold hardy and grow well in cool places. They look rather like small leeks (*A. ampeloprasum porrum*), bearing a long stem and little top foliage. They do not develop rounded onion bulbs, but form into a tightly packed clump of hollow stems and leaves. Greens have a mild flavour and are most often used like spring onions or in soups and stews.

Grow bunching onions in the same way as shallots, sowing each year in autumn, or otherwise divide established plants every three or four years.

Varieties

There are red and white-skinned varieties, such as "Red Bunching", "Evergreen Bunching" and "Evergreen White Bunching" – all "Welsh" onions developed in the USA. "Iskikura" and "Long White Ishikura" are Japanese bunching onions.

Egyptian or Tree onion

(*Allium cepa* var. *viviparum*)

"The tree-onion is a curious and interesting plant, and when forming its top bulbs, a truly beautiful object," wrote Shirley Hibberd in *Profitable Gardening* (London 1880). "On one plant we have had thirty bulbs large and small, in the top, and two ground bulbs in place of the one planted."

Egyptian onions have bulbs both at the roots and at the top. Flowers become clusters of small bulbs or bulbils (the size of "cocktail" onions) at the end of their hollow stems, which grow to one metre or more in height.

You can eat the whole plant. The purple-skinned top bulbs, pungent and strong tasting, are chopped and eaten raw, boiled, fried, or pickled alone or with cucumbers. The new green tips are treated like chives and the coarser white lower stalks add flavour to salads and soups.

Growing

Egyptian onions have developed an ingenious method of self-propagation. When the hollow stems weaken, they bend down to the ground and the bulbils at the top of the stem take root and grow. As well, the rounded base in the ground (not a true bulb) multiplies and splits into several sections. From

each section grows a slender stalk which can be eaten as a spring onion.

Tree onions are cold hardy. Bulbils planted in early spring in a sunny spot will mature in midsummer. Propagate either from root "bulbs" formed in the soil or on the tops. Press bulbs down firmly in shallow drills or birds will pull them up. Otherwise plant root bulbs in triangular groups about 20 cm apart. Support plants with stakes or bamboo sticks when they reach 60 cm in height. It's best to allow only one head to form on each plant. Store bulbils by hanging them upside down in a cool place.



All parts of the Egyptian or Tree Onion are edible.

Potato onion

(*Allium cepa* – *Aggregatum* group)

Like tree onions, potato onions are supposed to have originated in Egypt, but – perhaps because they grow underground like potatoes – they are very popular in Ireland. Plants form offsets of bulbs under the surface of the soil, which multiply from the parent bulb.

These flattish, golf-ball size onions have a sweet flavour rather like chives. They are grown and used for pickling and flavouring in the same way as shallots.

Plant bulbs in winter in well-drained, sandy soil.

To ripen potato onions, you should draw earth away from the stem to expose the bulb (but not the roots) to the sun. After lifting, shake off soil and store the bulbs in a cool, dry, airy place.

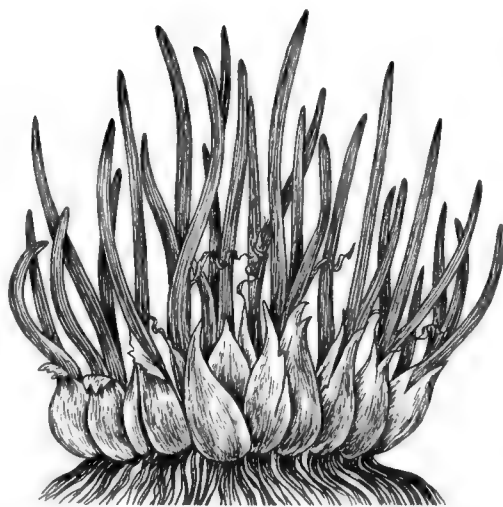
Shallot

(*Allium cepa* var. *aggregatum*)

The names shallot (*échalote* in French) and “scallion” (usually meaning a spring onion) are derived from Ascalon, once a Philistine city, and now the port of Ashkelon in Israel. In 1192 Richard the Lionheart defeated the army of the Kurdish warrior and Egyptian sultan Salah-ed-Din (Saladin) at Ascalon and it is likely that his English soldiers took shallots home with them from the Crusades. For this reason the shallot was previously classified as *A. ascalonicum*.

Long considered a distinct species, shallots are now thought to be just another onion variety of the *Ageratum* group, which includes the potato onion. Shallots differ from the common European or globe onion (*Allium cepa*) because plants multiply freely from lateral bulbs.

Although Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (AD 79) said “Ascalonion Onions” were good for sauce, shallots



The mild flavoured shallot is thought to have come to Europe after the Crusades.

are superior in salads and probably the tastiest pickling onions. They have a mild flavour, something between onion and garlic.

Growing

Shallots are perennials that do best in well-drained soil enriched with rotted compost or manure. It's a good idea to prepare raised beds in winter before planting.

In Europe, seasoned gardeners had a proverb for both shallots and Egyptian tree onions: “Plant on the shortest day, lift on the longest day”.

Divide bulbs and replant by pressing each bulb into the soil, but without covering it. One

bulb might produce a dozen more. Plant in rows about 30 cm apart and 30 cm between the bulbs in the rows. Dig in some wood ashes in spring to provide potash.

When plants mature at the end of summer, bend over the necks to encourage ripening. They are ready to lift when the stalks are yellow.

Shallots keep well and develop flavour if kept in mesh bags (to allow air to circulate) in a dry place for about one month before pickling, or store longer for use all year around. First allow bulbs to “cure” in the shade for about two weeks.

Varieties

There are long and short types of shallot. Some French varieties have a beautiful red-pink streak through the stalk, while “Dutch Yellow” is straw-coloured.

“Giant Yellow” has a mild flavour and keeps well; “Brittany”, “Giant Red-skinned” and “Multi-Stalk Shallot Bunching” are reliable. “Jersey” tends to produce oblong side bulbs and divided crowns like the potato onion. “Delta Giant” shallot is a cross between *A. cepa* and an *A. fistulosum* relative.

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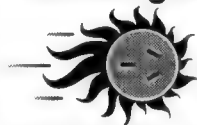
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BAXTER — The Truth

Earth Garden's long-standing natural building writer, Bob Rich — himself a former refugee — travelled to the Baxter Detention Centre near Port Augusta in South Australia for the Easter 2005 demonstration. Here, Bob describes what you'll never read in the mainstream press about the places that were conceived and built by Paul Keating's government, and developed to their full potential by John Howard, with quiet encouragement from Kim Beazley.



Police blockade the protesters in front of the Baxter Detention Centre. Photograph by Frank Bonic

by Bob Rich

Moora Moora Community, Victoria.

TWELVE Darth Vaders emerge from the melée. Black helmets tower over young men and women, black-armoured shoulders are the bows of aircraft carriers, parting the wave of protesters. A short, scrawny man of about 45 stands bewildered, perhaps frightened. He is in the way of a storm trooper carrying a crumpled-up kite in his left hand. The big bully puts his right hand on the small man's chest and shoves. Contempt, blood-lust, an almost sexual high show on the young face behind the riot mask.

— *Baxter Detention Centre, Easter Sunday, 27 March, 2005.*

Why did I go to demonstrate at Baxter?

History remembers Stalin for Siberia. If history remembers Howard at all, it will be for Iraq, children overboard — and Baxter.

Oh, we don't kill our camp inmates. We send them back so the repressive regimes they fled from can do the killing. Meanwhile, they get worse treatment than any murderer. We've driven several to suicide that way — neat when you can blame the victim. Most Australians have been fooled by the emotive labels, the government's lies repeated by the media.

Boat people are *not* illegal immigrants. It is legal under international law to seek asylum if you face imprisonment or worse for racial/ethnic, religious or political

reasons. There *are* illegal immigrants in Australia, perhaps 50,000. They come on tourist visas from countries like Britain, then stay. Why doesn't the government hunt them down? They are typically white, and come from a nominally Christian country.

Asylum seekers are *not* queue jumpers. There are immigration queues in London and Athens. There isn't one in Tehran. How do you join a queue if your life is at risk because your devotion to Islam has been questioned?

Why does the Australian Government break international law by putting asylum seekers in camps, subjecting them to torture and inhumane treatment? Many Australians, including the Howard Government, fear a flood of millions of boat people unless we "send a firm message that they're not wanted here". This logic reminds me of the Ku Klux Klan.

Bob a former refugee

As a refugee in 1957, I was treated well by the Menzies Government, welcomed by many people. But others heaped the same emotional excrement on me. I've also been told to go back to where I came from.

At that time, Greeks and Italians were "greasy wogs who should piss off". Our culture is now richer for their presence and they have become part of us. Given time, so will Chinese and Vietnamese — and Iraqis and Iranians and Afghans.

Besides, why should the millions come here? Europe is *far* closer. And yet, Australia is the only country that



Bob reflects the riot police line up in his sunglasses.
Photograph by Frank Bonig.

puts asylum seekers behind electrified wire, and uses solitary confinement and torture as management tools. Other countries, receiving far more refugees, treat them like I was treated 48 years ago: offering basic accommodation, food, access to employment, school for kids, social services. This is why I went to Baxter.

What really happened

My friend Jeremy Shub is a teacher at the Little Yarra Steiner School in Yarra Junction, east of Melbourne. He intended to go to Baxter. One of his students wanted to come, and the two of them organised a busload: eight adults, 14 young women and three young men. We left on a Thursday afternoon, and after a somewhat adventurous trip, arrived at the police barricade at sunset on Friday. No, you're not allowed to drive the bus up to the campsite to unload. No vehicles beyond here. And move back from the barricade as soon as possible, or your bus will be towed away. I grab a load and start the walk. On the way back I count steps — 500 metres, with several trips for each of us.

It's dark by the time we have set up and eaten but I've had time enough to get a feel for the place. Music, laughter, quiet chatter. The full moon lights a hostile landscape of barren hills and prickly salt bush, and a friendly landscape of smiling and togetherness.

There is very little organisation, but it's all working. Someone sees a need, and does something about it. Sydney digs one set of latrines, Perth another. VicRAC — Victorian Refugee Action Group — has a PA system set up, so becomes the lost property centre. If I left a wallet full of money on a rock, it would be handed in to VicRAC, every cent still there. You don't steal from family.

Action

The word passes: we are going. I'm surprised by the distance — later I learn that we're forced to camp 3.5 kilometres from Baxter. Like the 500 metre walk from cars to camp, it's petty needling. It has no effect on the many people around me, even on the fat and unfit — everyone



The riot police want the protesters' kites. Photograph by Frank Bonig.

is cheerful. I'm glad of exercise after the long ride. The first sight of authority is a giant roaring constellation — a helicopter buzzes the long column of happy walkers, stabs its searchlight along barren slopes to spot the non-existent flanking attack.

Baxter is a blaze of lights. It fits the landscape: huge, barren, forbidding. Floodlights illuminate big square concrete buildings separated by barren ground. Two lines of wire mesh fence rise four metres, the gap between wide enough for a truck. I'm told that one fence is electrified. Well beyond the outer barrier is an ordinary farm fence: sheep mesh with a couple of rows of barbed wire on top.

Close to the gate, a white post and rail fence replaces it. The gate is a pair of swing gates across the drive, which leads to a ginormous sliding door in the nearest grey building. The outer little fence is lined by immobile chess pieces in uniform. I estimate our crowd as 500. There must be twice as many police within. They adopt a look they must think is tough and intimidating. They form endless lines within their cage, solid, wooden, immobile. They wear riot helmets, body armour, huge black boots, gloves. Do they expect us to attack them?

If the police are the immovable cliff, we are the fluid sea. Armed with musical instruments, bottles of water, laughter and motion, we know that the waves of the ocean always win against the shore.

Saturday meeting

Saturday is *hot*. A meeting is called. We agree on objectives: close down Baxter, return dignity and freedom to its prisoners. There is complete disagreement on how to do it, with a small but eloquent group wanting to provoke mass arrests. We need something to focus media attention on Baxter. However, they are also respectful of group opinion, insist on personal choice, strive for consensus.

I point out that we need to communicate with ordinary Australians, and they won't listen if we can be presented as violent ratbags. Violence won't change the government's mind. Outrage from millions will. Those millions need to

learn the facts about Australia's refugee policy.

After two hours, we have a compromise, and devise tactics. Two hundred or so are willing to risk arrest by crossing the farm fence. The aim is to go around the back, where the prisoners have been moved to. Maybe they'll see us.

The brave 200 have wrapped themselves in a long strip of plastic orange mesh, the kind you see on roadsides. Each holds on to three other people: one each side, one in front. They are allowed to advance 300 metres before being surrounded by police. A troop of 12 black-clad men on white horses appear. Suddenly, big men in black armour rush in, and rip the orange mesh away. Two men won't let go and are pulled from the group. They are arrested. The mounted warriors now bravely charge their unarmed enemy, until a woman is hurt.

Media reports

I have read the media reports that our demo was violent. This is a lie. It was not. I saw no instances of violence by protesters. The only 'property damage' was pulling some star posts from the sandy ground, so that the farm fence could be laid flat. Nothing was damaged, and a few minutes with a sledge hammer will restore the fence. I witnessed three charges by riot police, which I'd describe as vicious bullies on a tight leash. Each time, they were after symbols rather than people: the orange roadside mesh; balloons; kites.

They were after the toys. If you resisted, you might get hurt or arrested, but people were not their targets. We are still fortunate in Australia. The privilege of protest is still ours — a Prime Minister of the Vietnam era said: "As long as it is not effective". He lost.

In Australia, protest is a choreographed dance where arrests are at the choice of the individual protester, and its consequences are bearable. Police brutality, even when it occurs, is unlikely to leave you dead, crippled, or even in hospital. I want to work for a world where it is so everywhere. If ordinary Iranians could do what I am doing, they wouldn't need to flee the fanatics in government there.

The police resorted to pinpricks, trying to provoke us. Aggressive protesters on the little square screen would be a victory for them. This may be one reason we were buzzed by a giant mechanical blowfly at all times — even a few searchlight-blazing passes late at night. The helicopter patrolled for commando attacks, perved over young women, roared through meetings and private conversations — causing about the same level of annoyance as the little black flies. Only, it cost the government far more money. Listening to us would be cheaper.

Saturday night

My peak comes on Saturday night. I know that a sing-song at the gate is scheduled, and my Steiner kids are full of music. Tomorrow's action is planned to include the flying of kites, in the hope that the detainees will see them. A small group of protesters is walking along in the light of the full moon. They reach Baxter, and as most of them

walk on, a woman stops, unfolds a kite, and gets ready to loft it. Bizarrely, she is surrounded by police and taken away. Word is slow to spread. We aren't wired for two way radio like the police. But eventually, the news reaches the camp, a group of perhaps a hundred assembles, and walks the long walk to the gate.

My first intimation of excitement is when the helicopter stops its random scanning of saltbush-covered hills, and races towards the camp. Its lights show the slow process of the group, made tiny by the desert landscape. Eventually, they are close enough that I can hear thin chanting even above the roar of the hovering monster machine: "AZADI! FREEDOM! AZADI! FREEDOM!"

'Azadi' is 'freedom' in Farsi, the language of Iran. Fists are waving, sparks of anger fly. Until now, our group of a dozen or so outside have been matched by about the same number of relaxed police within, enjoying the antics of young people singing, chatting. Now, long blue and khaki lines snake from the huge door of the building. Lines form inside the post and rail fence flanking the swing gate.

Noisy anger is met by quietly implied threat. The body language of the police shows determination, resistance, willingness to do what has to be done to stop us. Things quieten down after a while. Proponents of defiance walk off, taking the helicopter with them. The police don't realise that it's our mechanical kite. I'm sure its presence tells the prisoners within that we are here, every bit as well as the toy they'd confiscated.

Maybe 50 of us are left. Someone has brought dozens of candles, and suddenly a circle of sitting figures forms, right in front of the gate, each with a flickering little light of hope. They start to sing.

It is a puny sound under the immensity of the desert sky. It is a puny sound against the massive buildings, the bare, trampled fields, the floodlights, towering electric fence, the power of the State represented by hundreds of police, still lining the border between allowable and arrestable. It is a quiet sound, of young, clear voices raised in harmony.

Beauty soars. Peace spreads.

Guitars softly strum, the simple melody and simple words rise to the stars, rise to God — and conquer.

I watch a uniformed woman, arms on the closed swing gate. During the shouting, she'd been rigid, mouth under the riot mask a determined line, eyes steely. Now, she melts. Shoulders soften. Before, her arms on the gate were a bar to potential movement. Now, she seems more to be leaning on them, although the sergeant behind wouldn't have seen any movement.

Her body is still in the line. She will follow orders — yes. But her spirit has crossed over. Within her heart, she is with us.

And this is my message from Baxter. Anger begets anger. As always, the mainstream media have twisted our actions to hide the issues and make us seem a bunch of feral kids, good only for entertainment. Instead, we need to sing truth into the hearts of millions.

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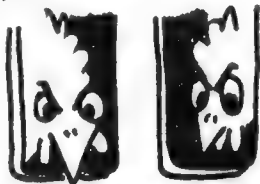
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Cheap Eats

IT BEGAN when my Mum peered at the salmon and mangoes in my trolley at the markets and said disapprovingly: "You live like millionaires!"

Well, okay, they were expensive. But millionaires? Us? So I started to calculate. In the, admittedly extravagant, post-Christmas week that featured the salmon and mangoes, our grocery bill was \$85 plus \$55 for the luxury fish and fruit.

That fed four adults for six days and eight adults for two days — and very good meals they were too if I do say so myself — plus morning and afternoon teas plus large leftovers to be devoured when the younger members of the party came in at 2:00 am, all of whom ate like horses. Except horses don't raid the fridge for leftovers at 2:00 am or silently absorb a whole container of biscuits just by wandering past...

Which makes \$140 for, well, over 100 meals anyway, or less than \$1.40 a meal, not mentioning snacks, plus the odd caller for a cuppa tea and slice of cake, which makes per person per day...

Nah, my maths isn't up to it. But the other reason for this topic, apart from my Mum, was that last week I saw an article on the US Department of Health's advice on cheap eating for those of limited means.

On their diet you can eat for \$4.60 per day, which is a bit more than I fed us all for. Morning: toast from a standard supermarket loaf, margarine, cereal, an orange...

That's about as far as I got. Hell's bells, the last time someone bought a box of cereal here (and left it uneaten) even the chooks wouldn't eat it. Chooks are no fools. Why would they want bits of crisp sweetened and salted cardboard when they can have corn and squashy peaches and a few delicious grasshoppers, still on the hop?

And toast is one of the abominations of the universe unless it's really good bread... preferably grilled till just crisp outside and soft inside and maybe with olive oil and roasted garlic and slices of very ripe tomato, or a proper sourdough loaf with vegemite or fruit bread with genuine fruit and genuine bread, that is — no emulsifiers!

Sorry, distracted by the scent of good toast there. Back to the subject, which I meant to be cheap eats.

Anyway, after the shock of imagining a life of boxed cereal for breakfast I looked again at the Department of Health guidelines. Sausages, mince, sausages again, lots of pasta... and I thought how can this possibly be the cheapest way to eat? (Not to mention that most of that mince would have been fat and gristle and the pasta white and tasteless.)

How do you know what's cheap this week without wandering around the markets, or even the supermarket, to see?

Okay, admittedly we eat cheaply because a lot of our food is homegrown — and when you have carrots or avocados or spuds in surplus you tend to eat a lot of them in many different ways (oh, for another 100 recipes for apples.)

But even without a garden of your own there are always fruit and vegies on special, even at a supermarket, for endless recipes for varied vegetable soups, stews, layered lasagnes...

So what did we eat today?

Breakfast: tomato and mushroom omelette, orange juice for Bryan and oranges for me (Valencias, a bit green skinned in the heat but very sweet). I won't say how many oranges — I am living proof you can be fat on good food.

Bryan had toast — good toast — which for him is a vehicle for large amounts of various jams, today lillipilly and damson and some of a mate's honey, very dark and very good — it's drought honey, the bees foraging from weeds and flowers they wouldn't touch normally, so I don't suppose we'll ever taste a batch quite like it again. Real honey always does taste different with every batch you harvest, as much fun as vintages of wine.

Cost: maybe three cents for the sugar in the jam, plus maybe another three cents for the extra corn we give the chooks. But then the hen manure I collect for the garden is worth more than the corn... maybe that should be a minus three cents instead. Oops, forgot four cups of tea between the two of us, plus milk, say ten cents for that.

Morning tea: two mangoes for me at three for two dollars at the market, herb tea while I'm working, no cost unless you count depreciation on the tea pot, though come to think of it I swapped it for a bag of avocados. Two glasses of homemade lemon cordial for Bryan, maybe two cents for sugar and citric acid.

Lunch: leek, bean and tomato soup, all from the garden, no cost except maybe five cents for the olive oil, bread to dunk in it, maybe 50 cents. Apples, late plums.

Afternoon tea: Bryan — two squares of Lindt bitter chocolate — one of the most expensive luxury chocolates you can buy, maybe 30 cents, two large homemade choc chip and peanut biscuits, five cents. Me — more apples, celery from the garden and an out of season mandarin that I picked this morning as I mooched about the garden before breakfast — a bit dry but not too bad.

Dinner: a sort of slow-baked lasagne but using slices of potato instead of pasta, maybe \$3.00 but there is enough for tomorrow's lunch too; stewed rhubarb with cream for Bryan, maybe ten cents for the cream, plus a bickie after dinner.

Snacks: Well, okay, strawberries, leftover grilled vegies with oil and lemon juice, more apples, and I'm not going to say how many.

I'm not going to bother to add it up: numbers and I aren't the best of friends (literally — with my form of dyslexia I find it hard to focus on them long enough to add them up, much less do anything more complicated with them). But I have a feeling that the entire cost for the day was less than \$US4.60 each and we ate a damned sight better.

Which is common sense really.

The cheapest diet is the peasant diet, lots and lots of vegies and fruit in season, some eggs and a little meat if you are that way inclined from the animals that are part of your growing system, be they chook or pig or goose or pheasant, snail or South American giant guinea pig.

Peasants eat that way because it's cheap and we've inherited tens of thousands of years of cooking experience to do good things with the produce. And there is no way that packaged cereal, even fortified with vitamins A to Z, can ever compete in tastiness, cheapness, or healthiness with plain good tucker.

Where recipes come from

Supermarkets are where you go to find 200 grams of chickpeas and a can of crushed tomatoes. But when you go to a farmers' market — or, even better, have 110 kilos of tomatoes, six basil bushes, a giant zucchini useful for braining burglars but if no burglars are around in dire need of stuffing, then you get a recipe. You've got no choice. Either work out how to use what you've got or see it rot.

What else is in the garden? Leeks? Sauté them in olive oil, preferably from trees you know, peel tomatoes, sauté till everything is mushy, add basil, scrape out zuc-

chini innards, pour in the leek and tomato pulp, bake till soft and the bottom just very gently caramelised.

Come to think of it, this is the sort of cooking you do if you are 'home based' too, with a job that allows you to pick dinner at morning tea, bung it in the oven at lunch time, then smell it as it lingers in the curtains for the next three days.

Maybe that's why most people don't grow fruit or vegies they aren't familiar with — they don't know what to do with them.

Kitchen fruit tree

Anyway, for those who might possibly be tempted to plant some more fruit trees this winter here is one for the kitchen. (Of *course* you've got room for them! Just prune some of the big ones back and let the canopies fight it out as they get bigger. Or plant out the footpath. The kids don't need their sandpit, do they? No water? There's always a dribble for one or two more young trees, even if they only just survive until it rains again. And, anyway, these ones survive.

Pistachios

Why bother? Pistachios are one of the most difficult nuts to stop eating in the world, and their autumn leaves are lovely red orange and golden things in a good year. In a bad, over 40° C for three months, no rain for 11 months type of year, the leaves will just go prematurely brown and drop off. But they come again. (I like trees that drop their leaves early. They're usually good survivors. It's the stubborn ones that stand there all droopy just hoping it'll rain and save their bacon that cark it, like silver birch.)

Where to grow them: pistachios love winters that'll freeze your toes off and long summers like the back blocks of hell. They also grow quite happily in deserts and on thin miserable soils.

How to keep them alive: pistachios are small, backyardish sorts of trees, a bit like figs in shape. You need male and female trees to get fruit. Pollen is carried by the wind,

so plant them close together, in full sun — flowers turn brown rather fast in the slightest shade.

Late frost can kill the flowers, so it's an idea to plant them near a warm, sunny, preferably north-facing wall in frosty areas. Having said this though, our trees are in dappled shade — the trees above help give some frost protection — and we still get fruit. Feed them in late spring and mid-summer.



Pistachios love winters that'll freeze your toes off and long summers like the back blocks of hell.

Water them with a trickling hose, if you are going to give them a drink at all, rather than a sprinkler, to keep down humidity. Our poor buggers have never had to deal with humidity much — they are way up on a hill and apart from a few drops when they were less than three months old have never been watered. Of course they don't bear in a really bad year — or grow much. But in a sort of averagely terrible year you'll get nuts, in the sweetest green pink cases you can imagine — the sort you could tell a kid the fairies sleep in. But don't, as then they'll pinch the nuts before they're ripe.



Harvest

Knock the nuts off the tree with a rake or broom when they start to split open, preferably onto a spread drop sheet or tarpaulin.

Store

Hull the pistachios at once; dry the nuts in the sun for a few days, then dip them in six cups of salt to one cup of water, dry them again, then roast them.

Eating

In fact if you grow your own, you'll find they are just as delicious unsalted and if your passion for pistachios is anything like ours, you'll find that the only way to get all the pistachios you want to eat is to grow your own. They are stunning replacing peanuts in choc chip biscuits, and in pistachio ice-cream (don't salt them, just roast them and add half a cup of chopped, freshly roasted nuts to every four cups of cream) they're glorious. Pistachio biscotti aren't bad either.

In the winter garden in cool and cold climates

Step 1. Ignore all guides that say you can plant silver beet, spinach, carrots *et al.* Yeah, of course you can plant them. The ants will probably eat the seeds before they germinate, but, hey, ants have to eat and it's a nice change in diet for them.

When the ants' leftovers *do* germinate they'll just sit there waiting. Seeds have millennia of wisdom coded into them and they just *know* — or the seed equivalent of knowing — that one day it's going to get warm again.

And when spring and warm days come they get all excited as the best of us tend to do in spring and think of sex which, in the case of carrots, silver beet and so on, means they flower and go to seed before they've made any decent tucker for you: pale mingy carrots and tiny silver beet leaves that would be way below the age of consent if

Everyone makes a bee-line for the garden swing seat in Jackie's garden.

they were human.

Step 2. What you *can* safely plant: things that *need* to go to seed for you to eat them, like peas, broad beans, long maturing caulies (the short maturing ones tend to head too early as soon as it warms up, so you only get baby caulies).

On the other hand, a baby caulie is much easier to deal with if your life's passion isn't cauliflower soup. And do plant lots of onions, long keepers plus flat red ones, if you can find them, and every other sort in between. The onions you buy in the shops taste more or less the same, but fresh onions have flavour, and each is different — they're precious things to savour, not just bung in any recipe that says 'add onions'.

Garden essentials

This is also the time to add the other necessities of life to a garden. These are ours:

1. A garden swing seat. Everyone makes a bee-line for ours. And once they sit on it, swinging idly — you can't swing any more vehemently or it'll threaten to fall over ...even the most hyperactive kid or angst-ridden teenager starts to muse upon life, the universe and all the rest of it, and half an hour later they slide off, having yakked peaceably to the companion sitting next to them. One of life's great, unexpected treasures, that swing.

2. A bird feeder. This isn't for the birds, it's for you. Put food out at the same time each day. Birds are bright, as anyone who has battled a mob of white cockatoos can tell you. They'll work out when tucker comes. This means you get to watch them, which is more fun than any TV show especially as you work out their pecking and yelling orders, who bullies whom and when. More fun than politics too, though much the same rules. Just more colourful.

A little feeding doesn't hurt wild birds, as long as you are careful to give them decent food, not scraps that may rot or spread disease and that they aren't encouraged to shit where

they eat — damn it, you don't, so why tempt them to?

Our bird feeder is a plastic pot upended on its saucer. The seed is put in the rim of the saucer and the whole thing hung outside the living room. The birds have to cling to the edge of the saucer, so their bums are out while their beaks are in.

3. A place to sit and look at water. My spot is a seat down at the swimming hole and the rock up by the cascades. No one talks much after a few minutes sitting there. Just looks. It doesn't have to be much water — a tiny courtyard pool will do it. But the water must reflect the sky.

4. Paving. To reflect warmth onto the house and store it at night, and as a perfect place for brown snakes to sun bake so you can see them and not take them by surprise. Also good for tricycles or walking frames, depending which end of life's spectrum you're at.

Green cheese

When I was about ten years old I wanted to know why if the moon was made out of green cheese, then why wasn't it green? A question my loving parents answered yet again with, "For goodness' sake, just shut up and eat your toast."

It took me another 30 or so years to discover that green cheese is actually a pale creamy yellow . . . much like the moon when it's high in the sky . . . because green cheese is actually unripened cheese, soft and still sweet.

The best way to make green cheese is to buy a Jersey cow, give it lavish slices of fresh bread and peanut butter and copious scratching behind the ears, introduce it to a friendly Jersey bull then . . .

Well, okay, how about the second best way. Get a carton of milk from the supermarket — full cream (or skim, that my son refers to as chick's milk), or fortified with extra calcium and a packet of plain junket tablets. Make a bowl of junket according to directions on the packet. When firm, take a knife and slice the cheese one way, then the other, so you have a mass of tiny squares. Now dip a clean tea towel into salty water — one cup of salt to half a cup of water. Line a sieve with the tea towel and pour in the little milk squares. Let it stand for about two hours to let most of the liquid fall through, then ball it up like a Christmas

pudding and hang it up in a cool spot. I find hanging it off the showerhead is perfect, but make sure no one washes their hair over it, as the taste of shampoo doesn't improve the taste of green cheese.

Leave it for about 48 hours, squeeze it whenever you happen to pass by to get more liquid out, unfold . . . and there you are. Green cheese is firm and pretty tasteless, a bit like a homemade ricotta, but not bad at all with fresh fruit and extra cream. Try mixing it with chopped herbs and black pepper, or add sugar and Cointreau to taste, and serve it with fresh cream poured over it . . . now *that* is what I call green cheese.

Holidays

I have finally (as I reach what might be described as the lunch time of life) realised why I never want to go on holiday. For years I thought it was because it's hard to find a place as good as this: a bedroom with air as well as bird song, cliffs with wedge tailed streaks above . . . but even when this place is dust and dying trees I don't want to go anywhere either.

And then I realised. It's because I love the place. Like a husband, I suppose: they might snore a bit, but you still wouldn't dream of swapping them for Sean Connery for a week. Well, maybe only for three seconds. Or a toddler, tantrums and nappy rash and all. You love them so you'd miss them too much if they weren't there.

Simple, now I've finally realised it . . .

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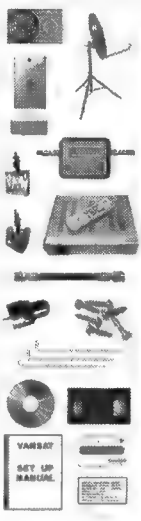
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From Spade To Blade

Garden Recipes by Gary Thomas



The gardening chef muses upon cravings and obsessions and reveals a couple of his own.

THIS happens. I stagger out of bed in the morning thinking “cup of tea, cup of tea”, and some bright faced tousled blonde haired button nose bounces up and asks me what my favourite colour is today. And when I say “black”, they say “but you’re not wearing black and anyway you have to choose out of brown and green”.

Er ...

Or they want to know my favourite food right now. I’m on stronger ground here because my answers never change. I get edgy though, because I suspect they are really trying to divert my attention away from the thing I should really be concentrating on, like how long until the school bell rings.

Favourite foods though; and cravings – there’s a question. I guess these foods have something our bodies are urgently requesting, even if it’s just a bit more attention. For my kids the cravings seem strongest for potato cakes (or scallops) and pizza and oranges and snow cones. Who would have thought these items had a nutritional imperative?

I crave lettuce and rice. Have for twenty years. I have to eat lettuce and rice all the time. Not together, and not every day, but all the time; a part of life’s fundament. I assume it’s for the muscle energy and Vitamin A these products contain. And like all cravings there is an obsessive element to it. Each of the following rice recipes have had their moment in my sun. This congee one, for example, fed me exclusively for nearly two weeks, breakfast, lunch and dinner. It gets sick of me before I get sick of it.

Congee

- 8 cups stock
- 1 cup rice
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 cup carrot chopped roughly
- 1 cup potato chopped roughly

- 1–2 tsp fresh ginger, minced
- handful of fresh coriander leaves, torn
- salt and pepper to taste

1. First, the stock.

Bland vegetable stocks occur when too much water is added to not enough vegetables. To get two litres of good stock you will want to use one and a half kilos of mixed vegetables including, but not exclusively, celery tops and tails, carrot trimmings, onion, herbs, apples. For this purpose, you can even use some chopped up pumpkin. Make sure it breaks up into the liquid before straining.

Wash and chop the stock vegetables and put into a lightly oiled pot with a good bottom over a medium flame. Stir occasionally for five or ten minutes so they don’t char then add two litres of water, a bay leaf and some peppercorns. Bring to the boil then simmer gently for up to one hour. This is plenty; any more and the stock might start to sour. Strain the liquid through a good sieve, pressing gently to get all the liquid but stopping short of those cloudy final droppings. (Very occasionally I’ll use a light chicken stock

made simply by poaching some poor young rooster in just enough water for an hour, straining and using. The rooster becomes sandwich meat.)

2. Place the hot stock in a clean soup pot over a low to medium flame with the onion, ginger and rice. Bring to the boil and barely simmer for at least four hours, preferably longer. Stir regularly to make sure the congee is not catching on the bottom of the pot. Think of it as an all day project that takes very little time. Congee is considered to be a rice “porridge” but often I like mine a little thinner than that. If it’s becoming a little thick for your taste, just blend in a little more liquid.

3. An hour or two before you finish up, stir in the vegetable pieces and the coriander. I like to add these as texture for



my dinner time bowl.

4. Adjust seasonings, remove from heat and serve. This will keep refrigerated for up to ten days.

Risotto

A little patience is all it takes to make a great risotto and, in this case, enough for two or three subsequent meals. You will need a good cooking pot capable of holding eight litres. If the numbers are too daunting, reduce the recipe by two thirds and feed four happy people.

- 1 litre tomato pasta sauce
- 125 grams butter
- 125 mL olive oil
- 1 large onion, minced
- 2 medium carrots, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1.5 kg arborio rice
- 200 g fresh parmesan cheese, grated

1. Blend the tomato sauce with three litres of water to make your stock. Don't be tempted to use it undiluted because the flavours intensify enormously as the risotto cooks. Heated stock will cook the risotto more quickly.

2. Melt the butter with the oil in your big pot over a medium flame. Add the onion, carrot and garlic, stirring and cooking for a couple of minutes until the onion softens.

3. Add the rice directly from the packet. Do not rinse before adding. Stir the grains vigorously to coat all with the butter and oil. Keep stirring through the grains for a few minutes until they are lightly toasted.

4. Add a cup or two of the stock. It will nearly all evaporate off. Stir well. As the rice takes up the liquid, add another cupful. Keep stirring. Be patient. Resist the temptation to add more liquid quickly, true risotto occurs when the soft starches of the rice creamily connect together the flavours in the stock.

5. Repeat until all the liquid is absorbed into the rice; this will probably take twenty minutes or more. Towards the end of the cooking time, check often for doneness by biting a grain in half. The risotto is ready when the chalky whiteness in the centre of the grain is nearly gone.

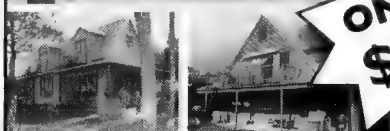
6. Stir in the grated cheese and any blanched green vegetable to hand. Remember this is a pretty rich dish. Serve.

7. With the extra risotto, lightly oil a muffin pan and fill with the rice. Refrigerate until set. Heat in a sandwich press or in a frypan, toasting both sides. Serve with a nice little rocket salad.

8. With the extra, extra rice make arancini. Cool the risotto then form it into little balls using damp hands. Roll in egg and breadcrumbs and deep fry. These are a delicious snack.

Cheers, Gary Thomas

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THE SENSITIVE NEW-AGE TREE FALLER

— PART FOUR —

Now you know how to start and use a chainsaw, how to fall trees, how to cut what wood, how to play safe and take care of the saw. In the final part of this series on chainsaw use and maintenance, we take care of the bar and chain.

by Jill Redwood
Goongerah, Victoria.

Tensioning the chain

The perfect tension for a chain is when it sits snugly into the bar with no keel below and can be pulled around easily (use gloves or a rag to avoid cuts). Lift the chain and you should be able to see the drive links. These are the bits of the chain that have a “keel” that sits in the bar’s groove (Fig. 1). They can tell you something of the state of the chainsaw by the various scars and worn spots on them. The drive links both drive the chain around the bar, via the sprocket inside the chainsaw, and clean out sawdust and muck as they spin around the bar. If the bottoms of the drive links are visible, it’s too loose. Being a slack operator, I often use a saw with a slightly loose chain, but unless it’s being used to cut on an angle, a slightly loose chain can be OK for a short while. The worst-case scenario is having the chain slip out of the bar groove and wrap around your hand. However, to be very safe in all circumstances, keep the tension just snug.

A cold chain will be tighter than a chain that’s had 10 or 15 minute’s use. A new chain will also stretch, so for the first umpteen uses, keep a close eye on it and retension it now and again. Sometimes a whole link might have to be taken out after a while when the chain stretches.

To tension a chain, undo the bolt/s that hold the bar until the bar will wobble a tad (Fig. 2). Then find the tensioning screw that is somewhere up front there (different for different saws). Turn it clockwise until the chain tightens slightly. This pushes the bar out and takes up the slack. Then hold the nose of the bar up while tightening the nuts back up. This can be awkward unless you have three hands, but you can place a block of wood under the bar to achieve this. If you don’t hold the bar up, it can lose tension again as you work.

Be careful to ensure that the tensioning pin that moves the bar along is actually engaged in the slot where it should be. If the bolts are removed too far, the whole kit and kaboodle can come adrift and as much as you turn the screw clockwise, it won’t achieve anything. If you have any trouble, check the mechanism first to get an idea of how it

works and ensure the pin is where it oughta be. If the pin is out of whack when you tighten the bar nuts up you could wreck the pin.

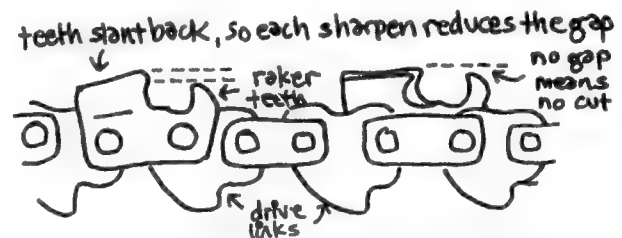


Figure 1. The parts of the chain.

Taking off covers

Sooner or later you’ll have to take the whole show apart for cleaning or replacing chains, sprockets and other gizmos. This is where you’ll most likely meet shiny metal things called bar plates. These sit either side of the bar. One has a slot in it and sits on the motor side of the bar, while the other is solid and covers the bar on the outer side but still inside the housing. The slot allows oil to reach the groove in the bar, while the solid plate stops the oil going beyond the bar on the other side. If you take these off, they’ll need to be replaced the right way back.

The cutting edge

The most common maintenance problem with new chainsaw users (and often older ones) is overlooking the chain. Obvious as it may seem, the chain is an extremely important ingredient of the machine but is commonly ignored. If it becomes dull it will overwork the motor and lead to other problems in time like burrs on the edge of the bar. The time taken to sharpen it regularly is well worthwhile. The rule of thumb is to sharpen a chain after every cubic metre of wood cut (a trailer load).

A chainsaw shouldn’t need forcing through wood. A sharp chain should cut a 300 mm gum log in about 15 seconds. Chainsaws should never need forcing, just guiding.

Very few people can sharpen a saw chain correctly without using a guide or jig. Every tooth has to be cut to the exact angle for maximum cutting efficiency. They also

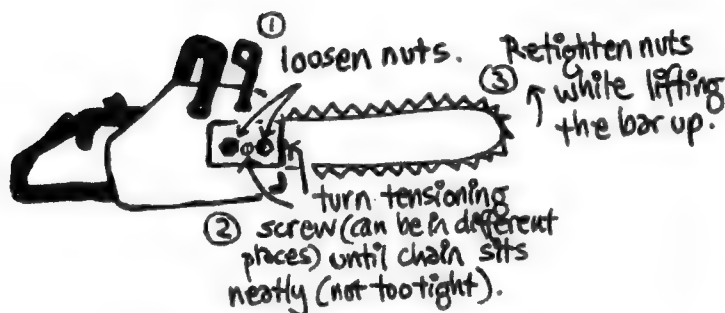


Figure 2. Tensioning the chain.

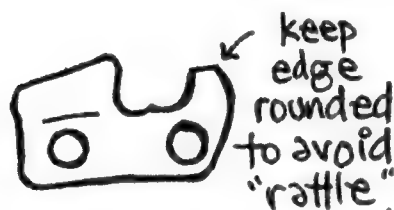


Figure 3. Round the edge of the raker to avoid shudder.

have to be taken back until the inside of the tooth is shiny all around, not just on the side edge but also the inside top.

Make sure you have the correct sized file. Don't attempt to sharpen the chain if you don't. A sharp file makes for easier and faster sharpening too. The file has to be kept at a 350 angle from the bar and drawn across the tooth pushing away from the body of the chainsaw. Try to keep the file against the underside of the tooth rather than pushing it downwards. If a chain hasn't been used for excavating the earth or grinding through nails, etc, each tooth should only need two or three passes with the file. If you have taken a chunk out or worn the tooth back in ant nests, you'll need to file it right back to the good surface.

To set the saw up for a good sharpen, I set the bar in a blacksmith's vice for a good grip (Fig. 5). You can also buy a small log vice that can be hammered into a log to hold the bar. Make sure the chain tension is correct so the chain doesn't flop about while you're pushing against it with the file. I also like to clean the teeth with a rag so that

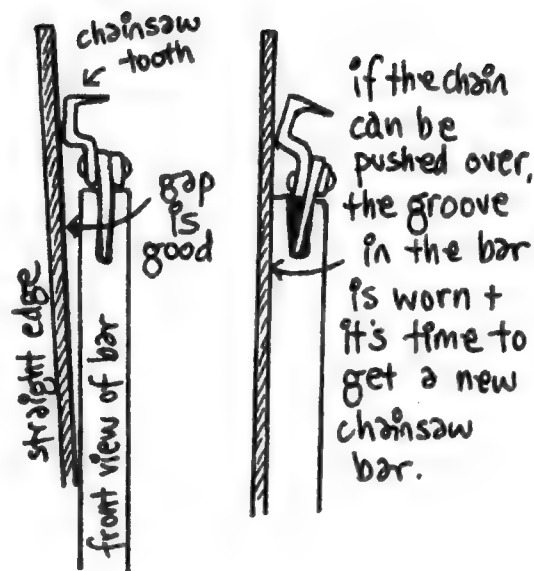


Figure 4. Checking groove width with a straight edge.

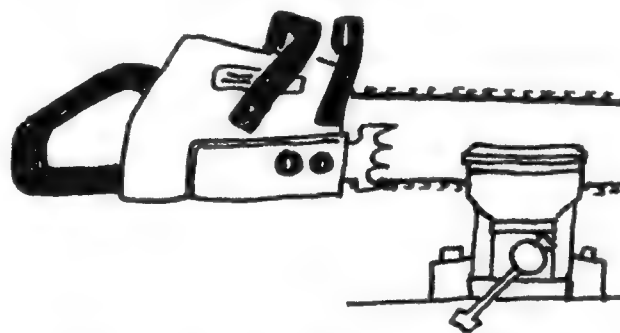


Figure 5. Use a vice to hold the saw steady while sharpening.

there's no film of oil on the teeth making it harder for the file to grab each tooth. I roll up a thin strip and pass it over the hollow of the teeth like a bit of dental floss. Another way is to dip the file in petrol as you go. You can mark the chain with chalk, a file mark or similar to tell you where



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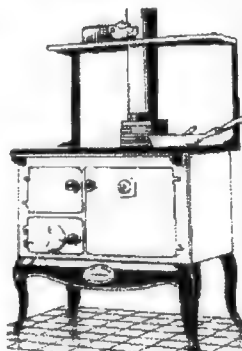
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you started. Otherwise you could keep hauling the chain around redoing the same teeth over and over.

A chain sharpening jig is a very worthwhile investment. I found one at a clearance sale in a box of bits and since then I've had no problems. They turn amateur sharpeners into professionals.

Raker teeth

The raker teeth are the little guys in between the cutting teeth. They determine how big a chunk of wood the teeth cut off. If you put a straight edge across the top of the cutting teeth, there should be a space about the thickness of matchbox cardboard between the raker teeth and the straight edge (Fig. 4). These also need to be filed about every second or third sharpen. As the teeth of a chainsaw slope backwards, each sharpening reduces the gap between the top of the cutters and the rakers. Don't wait till the chainsaw is spitting out wood powder instead of small chips – file the rakers before this ever happens. That fine wood dust plays hell with the workings of the chainsaw too, clogging up the cooling fins, air filter and so on. Don't use a round file for the rakers. Get a narrow flat file for the job and run it square over the tops. When you've taken them down a way and they begin to get a square front edge, round that

off a bit. Otherwise you'll feel a shudder as the edges hit and the wood. You can also buy a raker file guide as well.

Bar

A bar will last a while if the chain is kept sharp. If a chain is sharpened or wears unevenly, it can drag the chain to one side. This has the effect of cutting on a curve and jamming the bar in a round of wood. It can make for bloody awkward rounds of wood to sit on the chopping block too! An unevenly sharpened chain wears the groove in the bar to one side, tipping the chain over slightly and causing it to jam. You might be able to remedy this with a file over the bar edge, or you might need to take it to a chainsaw doctor. To test this, wobble the chain in the groove side to side. If there's a lot of play it's not a good sign. Put a straight edge against the bar and chain's teeth (Fig. 4). If the chain leans over so far that there's no clearance between the bar and the edge of the tooth, get a new bar.

The groove should be cleaned out whenever you get the chance and the bar turned upside down to allow it to wear evenly. You'll notice a couple of small holes in the bar up the motor end. Clean these out as well as this is where the oil flows to keep the chain lubricated.

Cleaning air filter and fins

You'll also need to clean built up muck off the cylinder fins. This overheats the motor and it runs hot.

Hiding behind a plastic casing, the air filter is another one that's easy to ignore. Search it out and clean it often! The air filter can be cleaned in petrol if it's a sponge type. Otherwise take it down to your local garage and give it a good blast with a compressor hose from inside to out occasionally.

Occasionally the starter cord can break (often due to a user or helper thinking brute force is all that's needed with a stubborn chainsaw) or the spring inside can give up the ghost. This is easy to fix at home without resorting to a chainsaw doctor. Anyone with a bit of nous can take the housing apart and work out the physics of fixing it. Just have a good look at it all and it'll be obvious.

Here's a general rule of thumb for maintenance. After:

- one tonne of wood – sharpen the chain
- three sharpens – file the bar edge burrs
- four bar filings – take to shop for a machine grinding
- three chains have worn out – get a new bar
- the bar has been changed twice – get a new sprocket.

Well – there you have the basics of chainsaw use and care. There's plenty more to learn about, but these last four instalments provide a useful start. Just like a headstrong horse, a chainsaw needs to be respected but at the same time it needs to know where it stands in the pecking order. They aren't something that we can be foolhardy or reckless with, and if looked after well, make for a firm farm friend for years.

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A Head for Heights

BASIC LADDER CONSTRUCTION

In this extract from the new *Earth Garden Building Book*, now available from 'The Good Life Book Club' for \$49.95 plus \$9.00 postage, Bob climbs the rungs of safe ladder construction and describes four models of ascending sophistication.

by Bob Rich

*Moora Moora Community via Healesville,
Victoria.*

IT IS possible to make a sort of a ladder by nailing scrap bits of timber across two uprights at more or less regular intervals. Such a scrappy contraption is unsafe if leaned against a wall. It may slump sideways, and weight is borne by a couple of nails which can bend in the wood. However, this method is good enough to build a "chook ladder" used as a means for walking up a steep roof.

Roof thatchers used to have two very light chook ladders. The thatcher would hop from one to the other and lift the first one over his head. In this way he could move along the roof without having to perch on the ridge or climb off.

The chook ladder is held on the roof by two short bits of wood that are hooked over the ridge. It can be light and roughly made, because it is supported by the roof for its full length, and the load on a rung is only a fraction of what it would be in the case of a normal ladder.

Figure 2 shows the minimum requirements for a safe temporary ladder. The rungs are seated on notches in the stiles. To mark these (and the angle of cut for the foot of each stile) draw up a right-angled triangle in which one side is four times the length of the other. You can set a bevel (a tool like a square, but adjustable to any angle) to this, or cut out a triangle from a scrap of ply or stiff cardboard.

Rungs should be over length to reduce the chances of splitting the wood when nailing. The projecting bits can be cut off later if they are in the way. Or nail holes may be pre-drilled. Use two 50 mm nails per joint. Here the nails don't bear any weight (the housing does), but merely stop the rung from coming away from the stile.

The diagonal brace at the back is essential for rigidity.

A permanent ladder is simple to construct if you take care with the joints. As indicated in

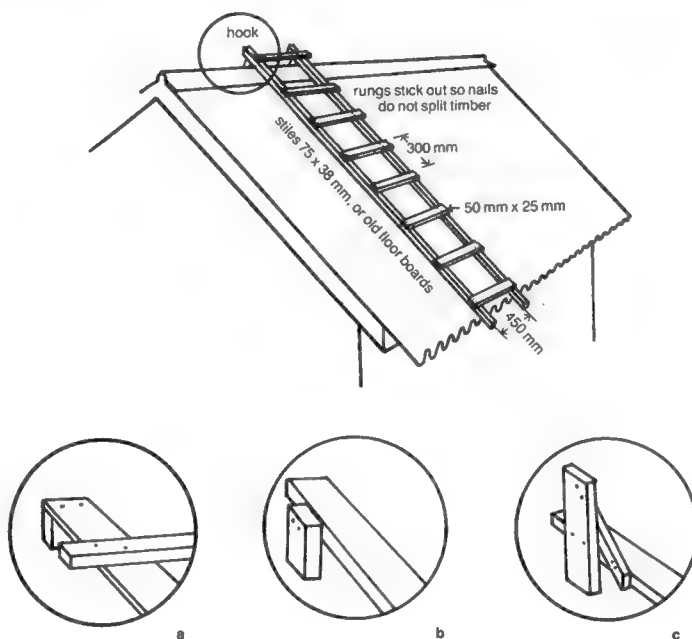


Figure 1. Supported by the roof, the chook ladder is light and easy. Figures 1a, 1b and 1c: Methods of making the hook.

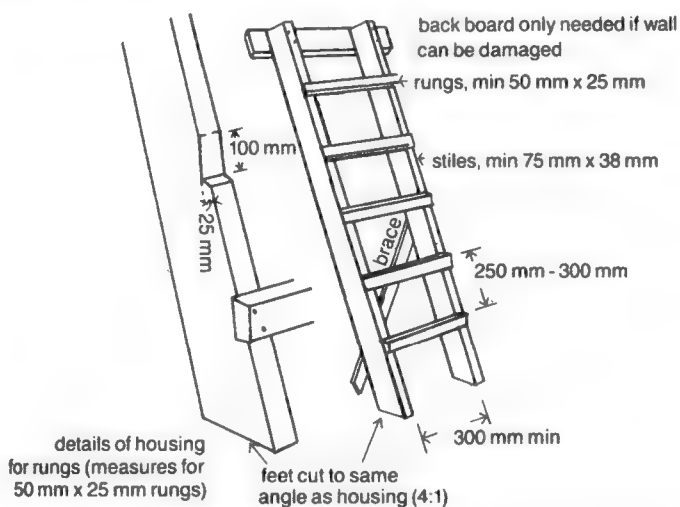


Figure 2. The minimum requirements for a safe, temporary ladder. Don't forget the brace on the back.

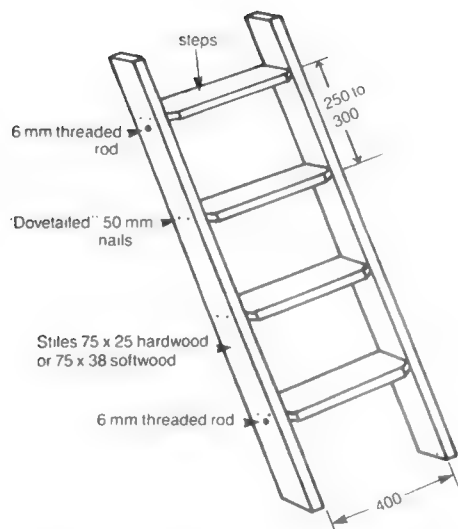
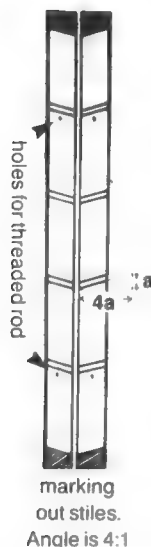


Figure 3. A simple permanent ladder. “Dovetailed” nails are driven through the stiles into the steps at an angle. Put the stiles together for marking out and use the ratio of 4 : 1 to determine the angle of the groove.

Figure 3, steps are held in grooves cut in the stiles. These should fit tightly and be exactly in the right position. To achieve this:

- Select two straight, faultless lengths of timber for the



stiles. Decide on the inside face for each (the face in which the grooves will be cut).

- Clamp the two lengths of timber together, with the inside faces touching.

- Make marks on the edge intended to be the front. Use a sharp, pointed object rather than a pencil. First mark a square line across both stiles to show the foot of the ladder. Measure from this line to the top of each step and draw a square line across both stiles to each point.

- Unclamp the stiles and use a bevel or plywood template to mark in the top line of each groove.

- Next, cut the steps to length and number them.

- Use each step to mark in the bottom line of the corresponding groove on each stile. This way you can get a tight fit even if the steps

vary in thickness.

The threaded rods shown in the illustration are only necessary if the ladder is to be moved around a lot, because the joints provide a surprising amount of rigidity.

The ladder will be more stable (and will look better) if it is tapered towards the top. The bottom rung should be at least 400 mm long, the top at least 300 mm.

Intermediate lengths for rungs can be determined as shown in Figure 4. The boards being made into rungs are stacked together and clamped. A straightedge is placed so that it is in the centre of the lengths of timber, at right angles to them. Mark in a centre line on the top and bottom rungs. Measure half the desired length each way from

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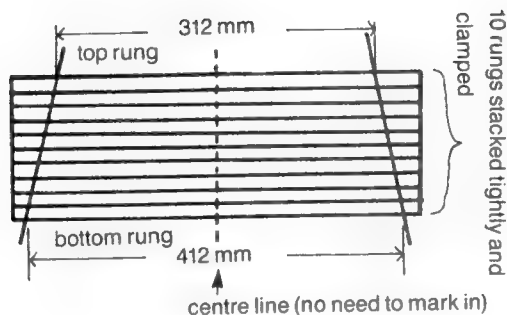


Figure 4. Stack the rungs together to determine their lengths.

the centre line on the top rung and similarly for the bottom rung. Remember to allow for the joints (6 or 10 mm depending on the timber used for the stiles). Draw lines joining corresponding end points from top to bottom. These lines give the ends of the intermediate rungs.

No new skills are involved in making a stepladder. The front is tapering like the one already described. The back can be made without rungs, except for a single one low down to tie the two stiles together. However, two or three rungs high up will make the stepladder more useful, because it can be straddled.

As Figure 5a shows, these back rungs need to be set on edge to leave room for the front when in the closed position.

The two halves are joined at the top with a 12 mm threaded rod. The water pipe spacer shown is essential. Otherwise pressure of the nuts at each end of the rod will deform the stiles and make the ladder hard to open and close.

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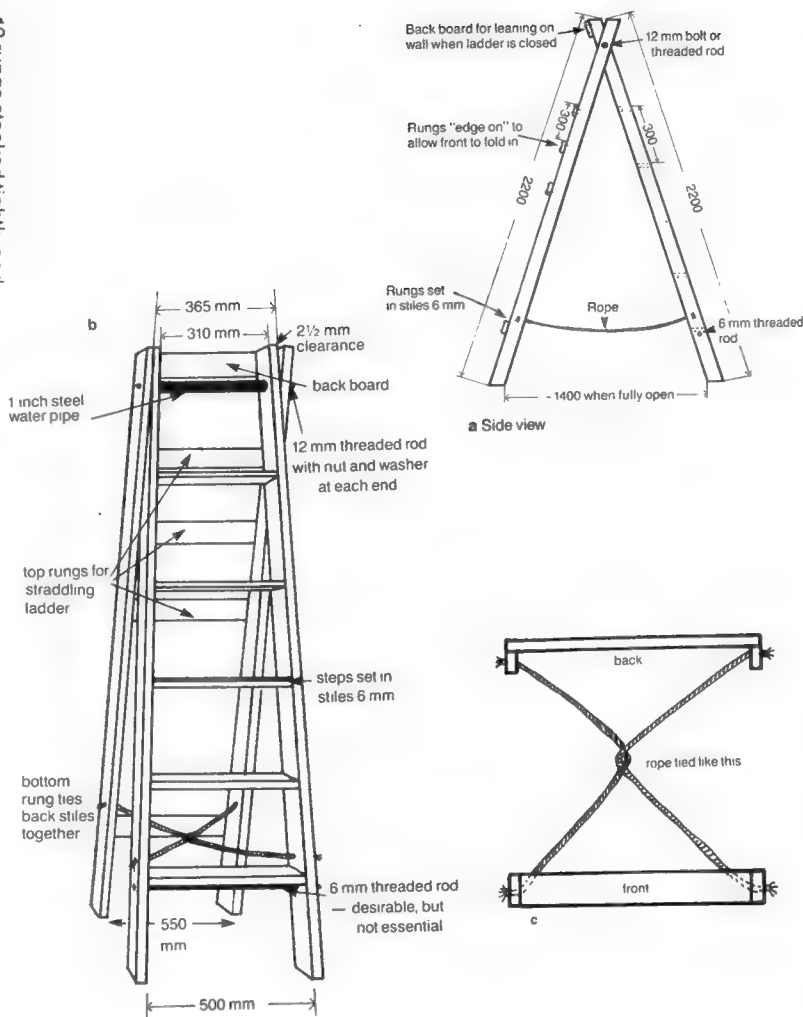


Figure 5a. The sides of the ladder will fold together using this method. 5b. The general layout of the ladder. 5c. Top view. Tie the rope as shown for a stable ladder.

ing your own ladders. And if you can make a solid, safe ladder, you can build your house.

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Confessions of a Weekend Hippy

- Winter 2005 -



On weekdays she inhabits a windowless office in Melbourne's corporate badlands. On weekends she's an Earth-loving, vegie-growing, wildlife-watching greenie in a forested area of central Victoria. In her latest instalment, Liz meditates on the results of rip ploughing, the seed ball fiasco, and the lamps she bought for Y2K. Now read on ...

by Liz Ingham
Yarraville, Victoria.

SUMMER was full of all the good things. Shoes kicked off, dry healing heat, dreamy afternoons cooling off in the hammock, twilight. The dam shrank to a brown puddle and its clay split into curled fragments. A dragon ate grasshoppers on the baked ground by the tank stand. Fruit ripened on the vines until we couldn't eat it all, and now I've had my fill I'm ready for winter.

I love the light in winter, with its dewy rich colours after the baked browns and greys of summer. The wallabies that hang around the house set off into the forest over winter. And so do we, since there's plenty to see and cool air to explore it in.

What a ripper

In a previous Confession, I wrote about our neighbour Ric ripping some areas of compacted ground, which loosens it without turning it over. This has revolutionised our revegetation program. The understorey plants we put in the rip-lines had a good success rate, and overtook their conventionally planted buddies within a year. This is particularly the case in the old horse paddock above the dam, which was very badly compacted. Ric ripped across the contour, so that water is slowed and drawn down into the ground, rather than rushing into the dam in a muddy hurry.

This hasn't been grouse for the dam's water levels, but it's been brilliant otherwise. Water is clearly penetrating below the surface, benefiting wildflowers in the whole area.

This winter we might try ripping an old horse-breaking circle, which might as well be made of terracotta. But our revegetation program is limited by needing to protect

the young plants from the wallabies, who really are bastards sometimes. We made a quantity of wire circles to cover the plants until they're tall enough to survive wallaby attack, but they're expensive so we should wait until we can re-use them before we plant more.

We could always get a dog. Or if we were Gunns Limited we could poison the wallabies and everything else that gets in the way and sue the closest 20 people who look at us askance. Actually, can I take back calling the wallabies bastards?



Seed balls

Another attempt at groovy revegetation was less successful. I tried making "seed balls" following a Californian idea that's apparently all the rage. The idea is to mix locally gathered seed with soil and fertiliser, form into balls, dry them and throw them. The ball melts when the rains come, and the seed sprouts above the weed competition.

I spent a whole weekend on it, soaking wattle seeds in boiling water, preparing different species mixes for different terrains, mixing our clay soil with sterilised compost, forming the balls and drying them. They looked really good. I

set off around the property like the Easter Bunny with a barrow full of eggs, stuffing them in crevices, throwing them into rocky outcrops and drafting an article in my head about what a fabulous idea it was.

Two years later, the seed balls still look good. Everywhere all over this property, you can still see perfectly formed spherical clay balls wherever I put them. The damn things haven't even weathered, let alone sprouted. I should write to Bob Rich about it. "Dear Bob, my seed balls turned into mud bricks, but on the bright side they

passed the drop test without shattering. What should I build?"

Eckletricity

Our little house came with a generator. It took us half an hour to get going, and two minutes to decide never to use it again. At night we light oil lamps and candles, which make gentle pools of light. Lamp light is quiet and restful. It doesn't run a telly or a blender. You can't get emails on it.

The house also came with some solar panels. I got all excited about solar power for a bit, because it's so alternative and all, but never got past the design stage.

When the Valiant finally passed on (it donated its organs that other Valiants may live), we souvenired its battery and radio. A 12-volt wire snaked its way into the kitchen. Later we added a small light for cooking.

With winter drawing in, a few extra lights would make the place so much more convenient. If I got a proper battery, I could put a light above the sink for washing up and one so I can read on the couch in front of the fire. You can't put lamps on a couch. Trevor wants one over the table. One in the bathroom, obviously, because you worry about visitors with candles, especially kids. We'll only use the lights occasionally and keep the lamps for ordinary use ...

Yeah, right. I give it precisely one month before we start to automatically feel for the switch as we go through the door, like our guests do.

Last weekend I lit a few extra candles and knitted a hat for my friend Nioka while Trevor read aloud from a book by lamplight. We never do that in Melbourne, never. (OK, quick confession: we did it once when I wanted to prove the lamps I bought for the Y2K disaster were nevertheless useful. Yes, laugh it up.) I'm worried that if we gain electricity, we'll lose something else.

Making a wish

Last week we went out at dusk to watch our nesting boxes. We lifted the lid on three of them the previous week and found intricately constructed leaf nests, each one made

with hundreds of leaves stacked on their sides in perfect formation, like modern art, and a circular leafy hollow in the middle. Two of the boxes had a pair of Tuans curled up in them, with their silky tails thrown over their shoulders. We suspected the Tuans were sleeping in Sugar Glider nests, since I'd heard the insane yap of a Sugar Glider earlier in the season and the book says they make leafy nests.

We set up our cushions on the forest floor and settled in to wait. The air was cool and fragrant after a warm autumn day, and it was so lovely, watching the stars brighten for an hour, listening to night noises. There was no traffic noise, no distant generators or stereos, and the darkness covered any sign of humans.

Nothing emerged from the nesting box, but I heard some noises in a tree behind me and a Sugar Glider flew right overhead, silhouetted against the sky. A few minutes later, I shone my torch where I heard a soft thud and it was a second Sugar Glider.

Suddenly I saw a shooting star, and thought "quick, make a wish", but all I could think of on the spot was I want more of this. More evenings listening to nature. More sweet air. More companionable silence. Afterwards I kicked myself that I had missed a golden opportunity to wish for that million dollars I could do with. But then, maybe my first instinct told the truth.

Later we walked back to the house balancing our cushions on our heads, and lit some lamps.

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Nomadic wwoofer Colin broadens his horizons on a cattle farm in north-eastern Victoria where he meets a special family.

by Colin Statham

Tweed Heads, New South Wales.

I AM at a permaculture farm of 1500 acres, in the beautiful Tallangatta Valley, Victoria. I picked this next farm from the WWOOF host book from the interesting paragraph detailing some of the farm's achievements. One was the restoration of denuded creek banks, which, with help from Wwoofers, and others, have been planted with over 30,000 native trees.

This is a mighty feat itself, but to do this while carrying on the daily farming jobs using permaculture methods is truly remarkable and a credit to the owners, Janice Horsfield, and Neil Paulet, and their sons John, 8 and James, 10.

They have lived on the land all their lives, and have been farming in this valley for 14 years, achieving many long term benefits, including a gravitational water system from the highest point, reticulating to all points without the need to pump. There are swales around the contours that hold the water longer, all excess directed into dams, and an agro-forest of ten hectares, with approximately 8000 trees growing to 15 metres.

This is a cattle farm, where most of the feeding is done on a rotation basis, in electrically fenced paddocks, every two to three days so as not to denude the pastures. It is summer, and there have been light falls of rain, one of 50 mm, encouraging regrowth before the winter.

It is 5.35 am, and as the first of nature's cuppas is still swirling around in my stomach, I sort out the gear needed for the day. Nose bag (munchies), a "Zapper", fencing pliers, pieces of baling twine, spare fence insulators, gloves, digital camera, spare batteries, UHF phone with five km range, and water bottle, all the necessities when going out on a morning's run on a working farm.

It is just coming daylight as I fire up the 250 cc motor bike that has replaced the faithful horse, and set off before breakfast to ride around, noticing anything that is amiss, the fences, the cattle contented, and the calves are with their mothers. I check the water troughs, see that the ball valve is working correctly, with an ample supply, and any damage. I check the continuity of the charge in the electric fence with the Zapper, a gadget that indicates any break in the wires and current available. I check one of the two creeks that flow through the property. Bucheen Creek is drying out fast; another week and it will cease to run. King Creek, from the natural spring from the other side of the valley, is permanent, and supplies the property through the worst droughts.

An electric fence insulator has come adrift. It is easily fixed. It took me sometime before I got used to being accidentally zapped by a charge; it is really only a surprise and of no danger. A two-day-old calf doesn't look the best: it won't get up, mum stands close, apprehensively. I radio in to Neil who says he'll come out and pick it up in the truck and put it on a drip in the shed as it would dehydrate in this heat. The calf's mother develops mastitis, a milk fever, and Neil is unable to save her. Neil struggles through the day and a night feeding the calf in relays to save her when another calf dies from natural causes. Neil skins the dead calf and secures the skin around the sick calf. The mother of the dead calf, after smelling it for a while, takes to it like it was her own. This is one of the joys of farming, to see life continue. This live calf would have died under natural conditions, and it is good to see Neil with such a sensitive nature when with animals.

It is now 7.30 and after going to the next farm for twelve litres of REAL milk straight from the cows, it was back for breakfast to discuss jobs for the day. Eighty-seven round bales of hay are to be lifted whilst they are dry and stored in the shed.



Above: James and John on the cattle drive.

Right: strong evidence that wwoofers do work.



Neil asks have I done any tractor work. "Only on a Fergie", I reply. "Same thing", he says, and gives me a ten minute lesson on the hydraulics of his big tractor. Its front end loader has two prongs on the front to lift the 400 kg+ bales. I load them on the 1970s Bedford truck. The hay job goes well, but unbeknown to me the boys were taking digital photos and some movies. One shot was of Neil giving me the lesson on the hydraulics, my face a study in concentration. I then practiced a while on a log, got the hang of it, and then got stuck in. The job went smooth as, until the second-last bale. It just wasn't sitting right on the truck. I went to the other side and tried to push it back in line, pushing a little too much so the first side one fell off. It rolled downhill 57 metres, bouncing and carrying on like Mulga Bill on his bicycle, finally jumping the fence and landing on the dirt road. No one was involved, as the boys had gone home, there was no damage to the fence as it was electric, and the dropper just stood up again. It was another lesson on never to stop thinking safety, as statistics show there is one tractor-related accident every week in Australia.

Janice has a permaculture garden with all kinds of vegies that would win prizes, fruit trees, chooks, and plenty of water. She is a wonderful cook, and bottler of plum jam. It is school holidays and the boys and I were to relocate 150

cattle to a paddock six kilometres away. We did the job on pushbikes, and I can now add cattle droving to my CV.

The boys were to go to town for swimming lessons, an eighty-kilometre round trip. I got the job of taking them for seven of the ten days. They were a constant delight, with their inquiring minds working overtime, wanting to know everything, questioning all the time, until I threatened to put on a pair of ear muffs. One question that had me really stumped was "What is the relationship between the kilowatt hours of your Falcon, and the diff ratio, as against the speed of a turbo-charged Landrover ...Huh! Only a ten-year-old could come up with one like that. I thought for awhile, and bingo! an answer came, and I said seriously that it'll do thirty minutes in half an hour. It went quiet after that. I drew breath, and waited for the next questions.

I got roped into a cricket match for charity for the bushfire victims of South Australia recently. We had a ball, (and a bat).

I enjoyed my time here for a month; it was an eye opener to see the way the farm was run in a sustainable way, with renewable sources that grew without chemicals, or was made with recycled materials.

Neil, Janice and boys, you are the quiet achievers. You are the sustainable future, here and now.

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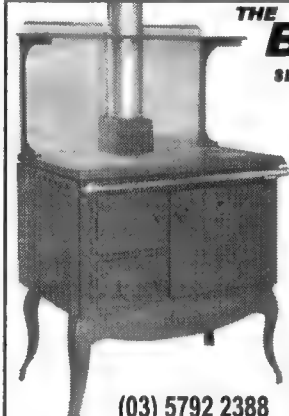
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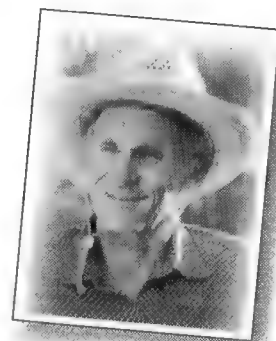
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Permaculture

in Hindsight



In this issue Bruce reviews the past 25 years of permaculture with joint founder David Holmgren, and begins with his first encounter with the man.

by Bruce Hedge

Newham, Victoria.

IFIRST met David Holmgren at the Bredbo “Down To Earth” Confest in late 1977. It was the early, heady, exciting days of permaculture. Bill Mollison’s irrepressible charisma and enthusiasm had drawn us to this stark delinquent landscape on the Murrumbidgee River just south of Canberra. We’d all come to hear the great man entertain us and tell us tall tales and true about this new and wonderful way of self sufficiency in uncertain times. Bill was the consummate storyteller and we were all enthralled in his presence. During a break in the frenzied proceedings, I asked Bill a question about something (I can’t remember what . . .) and he said to me – “oh . . . you’d better ask David Holmgren about that . . .” gesturing to a young, shy man nearby. Over the following 27 years I’ve learned of that young man’s wisdom, determination, and willingness to walk the walk and talk the talk in his pursuit of a lifestyle which leaves a very light footprint indeed on this fragile planet.

I chatted recently to David at “Melliodora”, his model permaculture site in Hepburn, Central Victoria. I asked him whether he had any idea in 1977 about the direction that their permaculture concept would take. “I saw the permaculture concept but I didn’t envisage the movement itself”, he said.

David’s attitude has shifted over the decades from ambivalence to acceptance of one of the most progressive forces for positive change happening in the world today, effectively connecting everything we need to change all at once rather than just one piece. “We have to change every aspect of the way we use natural resources and the way we live. Initially I felt uneasy about being a role model because people may copy things which are inappropriate to their own situations – they might take things out of context

– everything is always more complex . . . but now I tend to accept those things as part of the process.”

“Some of the people who now provide permaculture services have visited us here at Melliodora”, David continued.

“They’ve seen that it’s important to experiment on yourself first. If you’re proposing that people live differently, then the first test is ‘can you do it yourself’? This is a funny sort of challenge because some of the aspects of the permaculture lifestyle initially swim against the tide. For instance, the idea of growing your own food. Food’s the cheapest it’s been in human history relative to wages. When someone has skills that are in demand and are highly paid, it sometimes doesn’t make sense to spend a lot of time and effort to learn to grow a lot of your own food. But there are many other reasons to grow food. If we

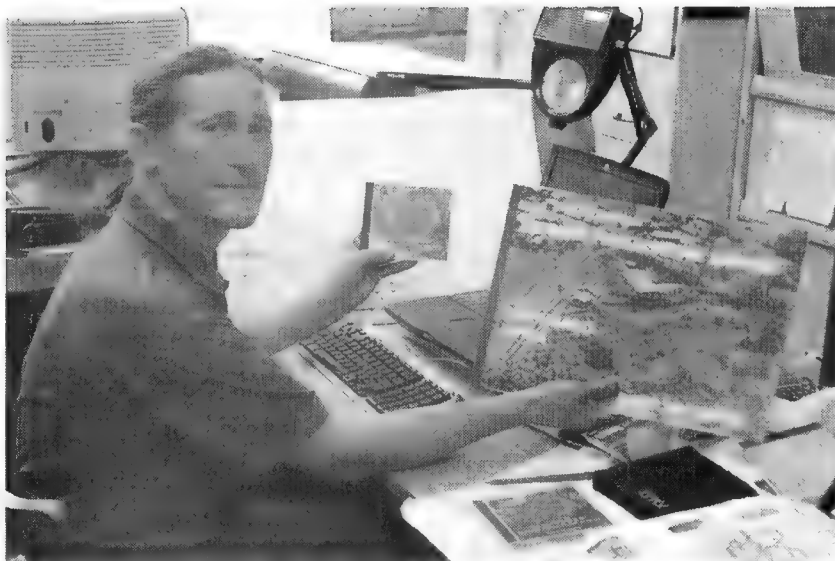
move to a changed economic and environmental situation, food will not be cheap. Then we have to ask ‘how do we skill up society?’ We need a lot of working models in different situations and you can’t just switch those models on overnight.”

David’s partner Su Dennett is committed to the same values, but brings different skills to the partnership. David says she has challenged him to be even more radical in his behaviour. For example, living simply with what’s in the cupboard or garden, or her passion about the family changing over to the outside compost toilet. In fact, David, Su and Oliver have actually closed down

their conventional flush toilet inside the house. Part of this comes from Su being the “animal person”, whereas David is the “plant person”. Su sees the value of animal and human compost and the stupidity of flushing good nutrients away with water. She has a close relationship with her animals, going out every morning to milk the goats.

“In any self-reliant household, unless it’s five to ten people, there are never enough skills to do every-





David compares the original A3 Melliodora book with the new CD ROM.

thing efficiently," says David.

"We always come up against economies of scale. Is it worth baking your own bread or milking an animal? Sometimes I have to ask other people to do work I really love doing. Work such as building a shed, because I have to sit at a desk running my consultancy. Even though we grow our own firewood but don't use much in our energy-efficient house, cutting it looms as an ever bigger task each year, especially as we get older. I'm now finding the culture change from my previous substantial self-reliance to a delegating role for some tasks to be very interesting. We're all a bit pigheaded about how we want particular things done and we have to learn to let go a little."

I asked David who had influenced him most over the years and he said he'd love to have met Howard Odum, PA Yeomans and EF Schumacher. David was actually taught at Hobart's College of Advanced Education by one of Schumacher's closest colleagues, George McRobie, while he was forming his early ideas of permaculture.

David has recently embraced modern technology to

update his 1995 book on Melliodora into an e-book available on one CD. All the original black and white photos are now in colour and David's son Oliver has created many virtual tours of this remarkable property. Log on to www.holmgren.com.au for more information. Despite the e-book, he remains slightly sceptical about computers in the very long term of our energy descent. "If your seed bank can't be accessed without your computer then that's a serious problem."

Apart from Bill Molison and David Holmgren, many people were responsible for promoting permaculture in the early days. One person in particular made a huge contribution. Terry White from Maryborough, Victoria produced the "Permaculture Quarterly Journal" for ten years. Hundreds of articles in-

spired us all. Terry then turned his considerable expertise to areas like salinity control and energy efficiency. David and Terry have known each other for 25 years. Recently they were chatting and found out that they were born 10 years apart. Exactly. To the day.

Any other permaculturists born on 28 February?



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Ask the Wildlife Doctor

by Dr Barry Trill
Maleny, Queensland.



In this issue readers ask about getting started in bird watching and how to deal with leeches. If you have a query write to our resident wildlife expert Dr Barry Trill at Earth Garden, PO Box 2, Trentham, Victoria 3458, or fax (03) 5424 1743 or email info@earthgarden.com.au.

Bird watching starter kit

Dear Barry,

I live near Apollo Bay on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. We've just come here to enter semi-retirement. The previous owners had cats and dogs and there is a bit of a garden of exotic shrubs and a couple of trees. I like birdlife and would like to attract more birds to the garden. So far we have magpies, I think currawongs, kookaburras, honeyeaters and some smaller birds. I thought the best way would be to provide some food for them. However, when I go to national parks they say don't feed the wildlife. What's the best approach? Also can you recommend the best field guide for a beginner and binoculars as now I'm winding down I'd like to know more about what's around us.
Jenny, Apollo Bay, Victoria.

Hi Jenny,

As a birdwatcher since I was a wee boy I can thoroughly recommend it as a hobby – you get to see wonderful animals and in getting to know them you get to know how the bush works. Because birds fill so many different niches – different ways of getting food and in different habitats – if you know Australian birds well you know how nature in Australia works.

There are a number of truly excellent field guides around now. The best ones to get have drawings or paintings (not photos) in them, cover all the birds of Australia and are a handy size to lug around. I reckon the best one for beginners is Michael Morcombe's *Field Guide to Australian Birds*. Drawings are best because they allow the artist to highlight the differences between similar species so you can look for the identifying features easily.

With binoculars you generally, though not always, pay for what you get. But don't feel you need an expensive pair to start. Any cheap pair of binoculars will allow you to see and identify wildlife easily. The best thing is to work out your price range, then check out a range of binoculars in the shop. I usually politely ignore the shop assistants who rarely know about binoculars because they mostly sell cameras. Actually look through the binoculars out the

door and check for the sharpness of the image, the amount of light coming in, and how close you can focus.

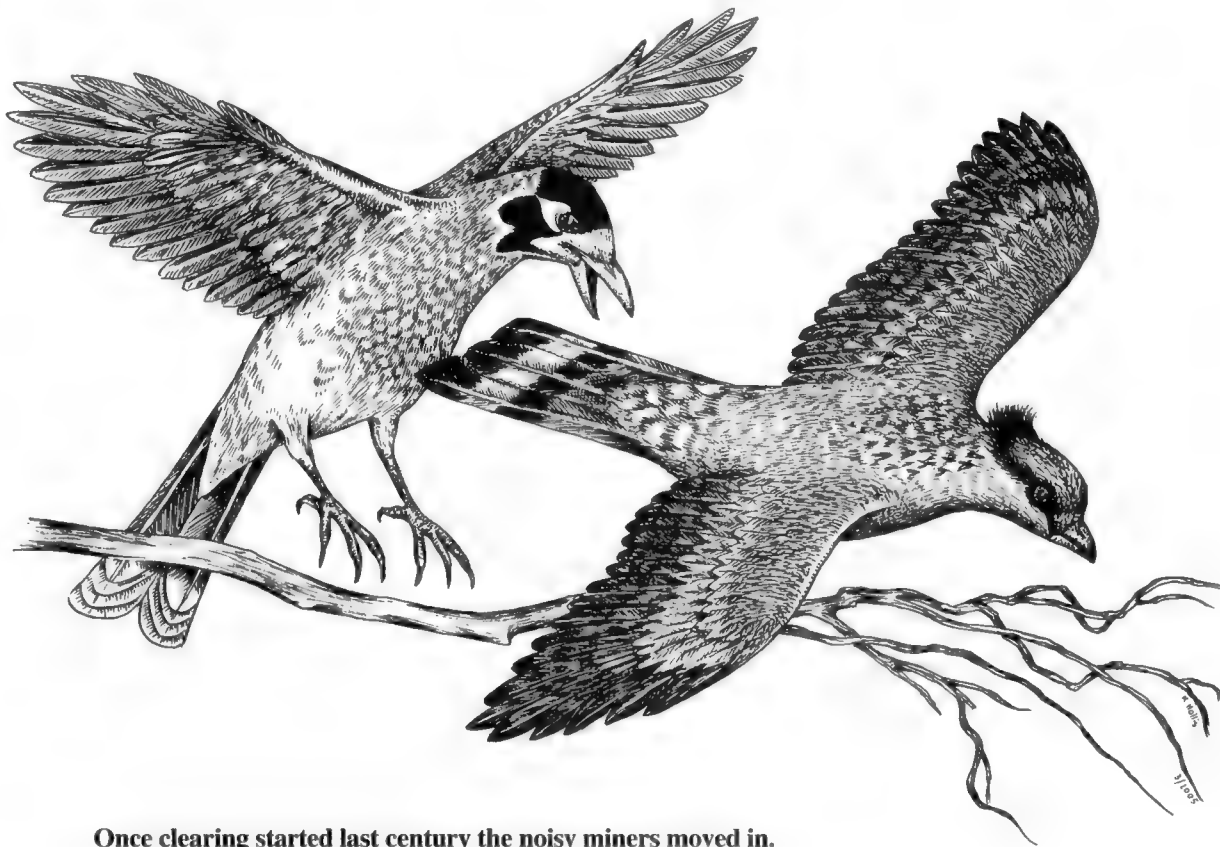
You need to focus one eyepiece first before using the general focus (the shop assistant can hopefully help with that if you aren't sure). Make sure the size is fine for you to easily handle for longish periods.

Once you've got your binoculars and bird book you can start seeing new birds. A common misconception is that you need to be an expert and spend lots of time before you can identify things. With the field guides now available anyone can just spend a few minutes a day looking out for new species and easily find out what they are and get a feel for how they behave.

Now with your garden – please don't start feeding the birds, no matter how lovely it might be to see them close up. There are two problems with feeding wildlife. Firstly, individual animals can become dependent on the food. If you go away or stop feeding them, they may then be in strife.

The other more important reason is that feeding usually attracts and encourages what I call junkbirds. Junkbirds are lovely, true blue Australian birds that have diets and behaviour which means they can take advantage of urban areas, farmland and other changed habitats. This means they have become very common. Species like magpies, pied currawongs, kookaburras, ravens (aka crows), butcherbirds and noisy miners (not the introduced Indian mynas; noisy miners are a native honeyeater). Many of these birds are aggressive, or predators of smaller native birds. If you encourage them you discourage honeyeaters, thornbills, whistlers, native pigeons and many other native species that aren't so adaptable.

To give you an example, I'm trying to replant rainforest and attract back the original rainforest birds here in my garden in south-east Queensland. Occasionally a rainforest pigeon, or a thornbill does stop and try to get a feed. But they are immediately bashed up by the resident mob of aggressive noisy miners – a bird that never lived in the original rainforest that used to cover the district. Once clearing started last century the noisy miners moved in, along with currawongs and crows and kookaburras and butcherbirds,



Once clearing started last century the noisy miners moved in.

all of which raid nests.

So I have lots of native birds, but not the ones that I'd actually like to encourage – the ones that are now rarer and which also help spread the seeds of rainforest trees for regeneration.

This type of problem is now happening all over the well settled parts of Australia.

So to best help the ecology of your area, start a garden of the local indigenous plants, and do anything you can to discourage the bigger and aggressive junkbirds which will try to dominate.

Think of it as creating a more egalitarian society. Someone's got to start doing it in Australia!
Regards, Barry.

Bloody leeches

Dear Dr Barry,

I've just come back from a wonderful, wonderful walk along the South Coast Track in Tasmania. I had a great time – absolutely amazing scenery, great company, and we were lucky with the weather. The only thing was the berloody leeches! They were awful. Legs, arms, faces, even our backs and groins! We didn't have any repellent with us so they kept on coming at us for ten days straight. I have three questions for your column. One, can you recommend a non-toxic leech repellent? I don't like using poisons. They seem to be blind, so how do they find my body

in the bush and can they be distracted from their hellish behaviour? Two, why do the bites bleed so much? I was bleeding and bleeding from several holes on the first day before I realised I needed to keep a constant personal check on my body parts. Thirdly, what's the best way to get them off? We used matches mostly but this was extremely tricky on the one very wet day we had. Since I've come back I've heard of salt, metho and all sorts of other leech removers.

Long live south-west Tassie – but the leeches can go to buggery.

Larissa, Palm Beach, NSW.

Dear Larissa,

Your anti-leech script reminds me of the old line – is that an engorged tiger leech on your groin or are you just pleased to see me?*

But to answer your very organised questions in no particular order, leeches, like all our native wildlife, are of course gorgeous and amazing creatures with exceptional talents. Finding occasional bushwalkers and the odd wallaby in south-west Tassie isn't easy. Land leeches, the ones hunting you, do it by sitting still till they feel or hear a disturbance on the ground or in the vegetation, and then start looping, towards you, the disturbance. They are very good at quickly getting under cover once on a body, and I believe from personal experience that they do prefer a bit of a cover before they start their bite. Hence common attack points are

in shoes and socks, and under the underpants line.

Once settled they do a V-shaped bite with their wee jaws. Then they are attached and pumping. To avoid the wound just coagulating around their mouth they inject an anti-coagulant, hirudin. Hence the profuse bleeding after they drop off. Once they are full, they blob off to find a quiet place to turn the blood into eggs to produce new leeches.

Preparations of insecticides do seem to work as repellent. Sprays or lotions with DEET in them are supposed to be especially effective. I have also heard of citronella sprays and rubbing with metho around the boots and socks having some effectiveness. Like you I don't like using carcinogenic insecticides unless I really have to. I've found the best way is simply to keep a regular watch to flick them off as they come in, and have thickish tight socks. Or you could give an organic oil like citronella, or maybe eucy oil, a go.

To get them off just flick them off with your finger. If they are attached I just scrape them off with a finger nail, or pull them off if I can get a grip on them. My experience is that this doesn't increase the chances of any infection. Certainly this *doesn't* leave any part of the leech behind, contrary to popular opinion. (Please note though, *don't* do this with a tick. Ticks need to be encouraged with metho or other substances to back out of the skin of their own voli-

tion. Trying to pull them off will often leave their heads behind in the wound).

If you don't like touching leeches, the hot match trick works well to get them off, as does touching them with any irritating substance, such as salt, kero, metho, or insect repellent. If on a long walk having a little container of salt in your shirt pocket should do the job.

To finish up I'll just tell a quick story about my partner Susie who got a leech on the white of her eye once while walking in the fine forests of the Rodger River in East Gippsland. One enthusiastic bloke with her tried to boldly poke at the leech with a hot match to get it out, until she resisted the treatment and got a steady fingered friend with good nails to flick it off carefully. Her eye got very blood shot, but cleared up and was fine.

Which just goes to prove that an engorging leech is better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*.

May your next Tasmanian walk have fewer leech-ridden ditches.

Regards, Barry.

*Sorry, since some friends thought of them I've wanted to use these corny lines in some public space. Hopefully my partner Susie is completely incorrect and they will appeal to some small part of the *Earth Garden* readership.

WILDLIFE In My Life

Dear Dr Barry,

Two years ago we made the move from the quarter-acre 'burbs to 350 acres of rural life, including 100 acres of remnant bush. In the first week we discovered a three-legged echidna we named Trippy (or Tripod) and startled a tiger snake looking for its breakfast. We promptly bought gumboots and started cleaning around the house!

Since then, my four-year-old son has had the thrill of discovering the resident "wobbaly" and spotted some "red belly-button" snakes in the paddocks. There are "rabbies" in the dams and a gang of emus visits daily.

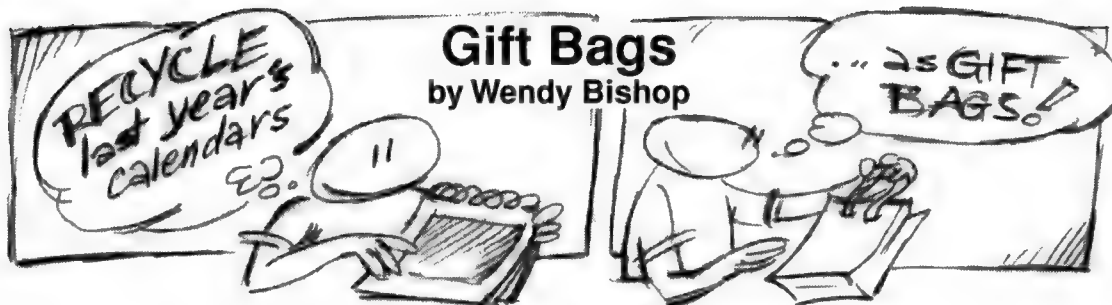
Every month there seems to be a different moth or beetle emerging to buzz around the verandah light and get captured in curtains of spider webs.

We bought just before the drought really hit here and got to watch the grass die, the ground crack and the dams slowly dry up. When we finally got some good rain I was stunned by the symphony of frogs coming from everywhere, not just by the dam. They came out of the ground to rejoice and I found myself sitting on the back step under the stars, listening.

I got so freaked out by not knowing the names of all the birds visiting the garden that my mother bought me a field guide. To realise just how many there were in my backyard that seemed alien to me was pretty disturbing.



It woke me up. I now have wildlife in my life and I feel so privileged. I get excited about going outside just to see what there is to see and hope I can help my children to appreciate it as much as I do.
Bronwyn.



1 Run a thin line of glue down the short side of the page. Roll up to make a TUBE. Handle carefully till GLUE holds.

2 Flatten the tube. Keep edges straight. Now it looks like a PILLOW. Use your fingernail to run along the creases & make them CRISP folds.

3 SQUARE the pillow. Use 3 fingers to hold the pillow flat on the table. Keep fingers close to the fold. Roll pillow over your fingers & make 2 new fold lines.

4 Now it's a BOX open top & bottom. PINCH top edges together. Flatten to make folds at the sides. Make folds crisp. MARK a spot 3 fingers up from bottom edge.

5 Cut along the fold up to this spot. Mark & cut 4 times. Crease and fold these flaps. GLUE the flaps where they overlap to close the BASE of the gift bag.

6 Cut & fold the TOP edge the same way. Cut 2 small holes in the fold line. Push the ends of a loop of ribbon through holes to make handles. Glue flaps INSIDE.

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CONVINCING CLAY

— PART ONE —

All houses will benefit from having their walls rendered with clay, according to Frank and Ingrid Thomas, who have many years of experience as natural home builders. In the first of a major three part series of articles, the couple explain the health benefits and other advantages of using clay wall renders. Subsequent articles will look at identifying different clays, simple tests and characteristics, plus techniques, materials and mixes for rendering house walls.

by Frank Thomas and Ingrid Leusch*

St Georges Basin, New South Wales.

CLAY is our first choice for rendering strawbale walls — or any other conventional wall system — because of its great health and environmental benefits. Earth has a vast technical and architectural potential in the construction industry, and it has been used in the simplest and most sophisticated structures all over the world. Traditional clay architecture is more than 10,000 years old and about a third of the world's population live in homes constructed from clay.

Non-toxic, healing, easily available, recyclable, low embodied energy, compostable, a pleasure to work with, soft and soothing, limitless creative possibilities — these are some of our ways to describe clay.

Why use clay

"We are our environment (and vice versa) at a very fundamental level."

— S & J Baggs, 1996, p14, *'The Healthy House'*.

Depending on where we live and what kind of work we do most of us spend between 60 and 90 per cent of our time within the buildings where we eat, breathe, sleep, work, learn, play and heal. A healthy, pollution free and comfortable indoor environment is therefore vital for our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Today we know that many 'wonder products' of yesterday, for example asbestos, pose a very serious health hazard, not to mention disposal hazards. We also know that health problems such as asthma, allergies, migraines, depression, malignant cancers and so called 'modern living or mystery' syndromes such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder, Serotonin Irritation Syndrome and General Adaptation Syndrome have increased throughout the population, including our very young.

Pesticides, long-chain molecule plastics, chemical glues, fibreglass insulations, aerosols, radioactive and mineral pollutants as well as electrical and magnetic fields are all factors in our physical environment which can cause or contribute to these health problems.

Using natural, non toxic building materials such as clay and straw reduces exposure to out-gassing toxic chemicals and provide us with safe and comfortable buildings, while easing the environmental impact of the construction industry at the same time.

Healing properties

We have probably all heard about the healing properties of clay. It played a large role in European medicine during the Middle Ages, retaining importance until today, and has always been used in traditional healing all over the world.

Usually the healing earth was named after its origins; for example healing earth from the Greek island Samos was called Terra Samia, Terra Aegyptica was mud from the Nile in Alexandria and Terra Japonica came from Japan (G Minke, 1994, page 305). This tradition seems to continue today seeing that we find for example Dead Sea Mud in most health food shops and beauty treatment facilities.

The healing properties of earth are due to its pain-relieving, anti-inflammatory and astringent qualities. It can be used internally or externally and is best known as mud bath, mud wrap, healing earth and essigsauere Tonerde (aluminium acetate). Bentonite is a stock feed supplement for weak and sick animals.

Applied externally, mud helps to ease rheumatic and muscle pain, stimulates circulation, protects from the sun, provides relief from itchiness of insect bites, helps to heal burns, treats skin conditions such as acne and eczema and can be used to cleanse the skin (visit the website: <http://www.shirleys-wellness-cafe.com/clay2.htm> for more details). Healing with earth is also known as pelotherapy (visit: <http://www.eytonsearth.org/eytonsearth.html>).



Radiation absorption

Another interesting property of clay is its ability to absorb radiation. Apparently Russian scientists use Bentonite to protect their bodies from radiation when working with nuclear material, by coating their hands and bodies with a hydrated bentonite 'magma' before donning radiation suits. Bentonite absorbs radiation so well, in fact, that it was the choice material used to dump into Chernobyl after the nuclear meltdown in the former Soviet Union. Note: there are many different kinds of Bentonite for over a thousand uses (see: <http://www.shirleys-wellness-cafe.com/clay2.htm>, and <http://www.bri.net.au/medicine.html>).

Today natural healing centres all over the world offer therapies where clay or mud is used. Knowing just this, it comes as no surprise that using clay to build or cover the walls of our homes is valuable to our health and comfort.

"Though I have had two serious illnesses in my life, I believe that man has little need to drug himself. 999 cases out of a thousand can be brought round by means of

a well-regulated diet, water and earth treatment and similar household remedies."

— Mahatma Gandhi.

This reminds us of a tale concerning our two children. To our amazement we have surprised both the boys from time to time licking and chewing on small dry balls of clay (which float around our home as they were kept from sample batches of soil we have tested over the last few years). Do they instinctively know that clay contains many essential minerals and has healing properties? And do they just have a bite when their body needs these?*

Air humidity

Clay also has the ability to beneficially influence internal air humidity by maintaining a pleasant and constant humidity level, optimal for indoor air quality and health. Air humidity is as vital to human comfort and wellbeing as temperature, and can have more serious consequences than the physical discomfort associated with extremes of temperature inside the dwelling.

Many people have the misconception that drier air is better, probably due to an association of moist air with the unfortunately typical problems of rising damp and mould in their homes. However, a relative humidity level of less than 40 per cent can cause the mucous membranes of the nose and throat to dry out, allowing foreign bodies such as dust particles and bacteria to reach the sinuses and lungs rather than being carried back out of the body via the fine epithelial hair lining the mucous membranes.

A high air humidity of up to 70 per cent has many positive influences. It reduces the fine dust content of the air, helps to protect the skin against microbes, increases resistance against colds and flues, reduces airborne pathogens, absorbs odours and decreases the unpleasant electrostatic charge on surfaces of objects. However, if the air humidity in closed rooms rises over 70 per cent an ideal environment for the rapid growth of fungi is created which in turn can cause or aggravate a number of allergic ailments. From this we can conclude that the optimum and most pleasant indoor air humidity should be at least 40 percent and not



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exceed 70 percent (G Minke, 2000, page 15).

Porous materials can absorb humidity from the air and release it back into the air; this humidity balancing potential is especially effective with clay. If indoor air humidity rises above 50 per cent clay absorbs the excess moisture and will release moisture back into the air if humidity levels fall under 50 per cent.

In a house built in 1985 in Germany, with all exterior and interior walls built from clay, air humidity measurements were taken over a period of five years. The measurements showed that indoor air humidity was nearly constant over the five year period, varying only between a healthy 45 and 55 per cent. Humidity levels are particularly affected in cold and moderate climates where outside temperatures are much lower than those inside. For example, if outside temperature of 0°C enters a room and is heated up to 20°C, its relative humidity decreases to less than 20 per cent (G Minke, 2000, page 15). For this reason, we often see bowls of water placed in heated rooms, so that the water evaporating into the air will raise air humidity. Obviously a wall built from, or rendered with, clay would achieve this much more effectively by maximising the mass and surface area available to absorb and release atmospheric moisture.



Storage hut from clay somewhere in Africa.

A solid wall of earth bricks can absorb up to 30 times the moisture of conventional fired bricks. Nevertheless, a thin layer of clay render is still able to absorb an exceptional amount of water. Experiments undertaken at the *Forschungslabor für Experimentelles Bauen*, an experimental building research facility at the University of Kassel in Germany, showed that a one sided sample of 15 mm of clay plaster was able to absorb five times the moisture of a 15 mm sample of gypsum plaster. In setting the conditions for this experiment, humidity was suddenly increased from 50 per cent (a comfortable and healthy level for humans) to 80 per cent (at which level we would certainly feel uncomfortable in either cool or warm conditions) at a room temperature of 21°C.

After 48 hours the 15 mm thick layer of gypsum plaster just about reached its full moisture absorption capacity at 40 grams of water per square metre of wall surface. After the same period the 15 mm layer of clay render on the other hand reached a level of about 80 grams of water per square metre but had not reached its absorption capacity for a long time. Further similar experiments showed that with the addition of natural materials such as coconut fibres the absorption capacity of the clay plaster could even be raised (G Minke & F Mahlke, 2004, pp. 33-34).

Another experiment

Another experiment conducted at the University of Kassel showed that a 20 mm layer of clay plaster can

absorb more than 250 grams of water per square metre, a 40 mm thick coat more than 600 grams and an 80 mm coat more than 750 grams of water per square metre of wall surface. In this experiment humidity levels were also quickly raised from 50 to 80 per cent at a room temperature of 21°C and measurements were taken over a period of 16 days (G Minke, 2000, pp 16-17).

These remarkable humidity balancing properties may cause people to believe that clay building products, by absorbing moisture, would be setting up the perfect conditions for the growth of mould or the onset of fungal rot. The opposite, however is actually true: ideal conditions for mould or rot are caused when a building material absorbs moisture and is unable to later release it when air humidity drops, as in the case of absorbed water becoming trapped behind oil based painted surfaces, or when moisture is not absorbed but remains stagnant on a surface.

This makes even bathroom and kitchen walls built from clay or rendered with clay more hygienic and far less vulnerable to the growth of mould than for example tiled walls. Where water splashes directly against clay, surfaces can be protected with casein, lime or silicate paints or small affected areas could be tiled or clad with, for example, corrugated iron.



Sana'a, Yemen, a city built nearly entirely from clay.

Other benefits

Some other benefits clay can offer to your home include:

- thermal mass
- sound insulation
- reduced electromagnetic radiation (EMR)
- fire safety; and
- preserves.

The insulating properties of clay are rather modest. However, clay render or internal walls from clay provide thermal mass to a building. Thermal mass is the heat storage capacity of a material. In climatic zones where the diurnal temperature differences are high, or when we wish to store solar heat gain by passive means, clay can balance the indoor temperature; storing the heat from the sun during the day and releasing it slowly during the night.

Rudolf Steiner, founder of anthroposophy, once said: "Only through mass can a good and comfortable indoor climate be achieved". This has been regularly confirmed by physical and technical data. We believe that the material providing mass for our home might as well have other valuable properties such as being natural, non toxic, vapour permeable, biodegradable, healing and so on.

Being heavy, or a high mass material, clay has good sound absorption qualities. It provides better sound insulation than lighter building materials such as timber, fired bricks, fibre cement sheets or plaster boards (E Thoma, 2003, page 102).

EMR

Electromog or Electromagnetic Radiation (EMR) can be divided into three categories.

1. Electric fields and static charges which are found around TV screens by friction or in clothing and the like. These are measured in volts per metre.
2. Magnetic fields are found where alternating current is present, they are measured in Tesla.
3. High frequency radiation which is present near radios, TVs, mobile phone towers, mobile phones and so on. This is measured in megahertz and gigahertz.

Tests conducted at the University of Munich, Germany in 1999 showed that solid timber and clay had by far better radiation shielding properties than for example concrete, bricks, concrete blocks or stud and plasterboard walls. From these tests they concluded that the superior performance of natural materials such as timber and clay is due to their unique cell structures made up of cavities, capillary tubes, cell walls, encased resins and various other materials: artificial building materials can just not compete with nature (E Thoma, 2003, pp 62-63).

Fire safety tests

German fire safety tests confirm that clay, even if mixed with straw, is not combustible, as long as the density is not less than 1700 kg per square metre (Deutsche Normen, 1956, DIN 18951, Blatt2). Fire tests of rendered (clay, lime and cement rendered samples were tested) strawbales conducted by the CSIRO in 2002 also validate the excellent performance of clay render for strawbale homes in high-category bushfire prone areas. Engineered clay provided by us was used to render the test bales. These tests concluded that it is clearly the render layer, which mainly contributes to the fire safety of the strawbale by providing a barrier for the combustible straw inside (*Fire Safety Testing and Assessment of Rendered Straw Bales for Use in High Category Bush-Fire Prone Areas*, 2002, CSIRO Fire Science and Technology Laboratory).

Clay preserves timber elements that are covered or in contact with the material. It keeps the wood dry and fungus or insects are very unlikely to cause any damage to the

timber, because they need about 15 to 20 per cent humidity to survive.

From all the collected information we like to conclude that any wall system rendered with clay, even with a fairly thin layer of 15 to 20 mm, will help balance air humidity and provide many other advantages conducive to our health and comfort.

With today's technology, advanced rendering tools and techniques, and many years of experience, it is possible to provide a healthy and non toxic wall surface for any kind of building — provided you use the right clay, reinforcement materials, and have the help of natural glues to provide a bridge between clay render and conventional building materials such as brick, brick veneer, fibre cement sheets, plasterboard, timber cladding, cement rendered or painted walls.

Of course, not everyone is inclined or has the opportunity to build or move into a dwelling made from earth and other natural materials. But for those interested in the health-enhancing and beneficial properties of earth construction, it is still possible to reap the benefits of clay building products within a conventional urban or suburban house with the application of clay render over surfaces made from standard materials. You may wish to trial clay rendered walls in one room of the home first.

The bedroom would probably be very suitable for assessing clay rendered walls. Such a conversion would be quick and affordable and the night spent in a healthy indoor environment may endow you with a fresh and relaxed start to the day ahead.

• *Part two of this three part article will be published in the next issue of 'Earth Garden'.*

*Frank & Ingrid run the natural building business, 'Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow, Strawbale Construction', and have many years of practical building experience. Phone and fax: (02) 4869 3302, mobile: 0408 415 806, or visit their website at: www.strawbale.com.au.

**Editor's note: our young children have also regularly nibbled on lumps of clay.

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How to make a gourd kazoo

In the second of his three part series, well-known author Scot discusses the secret of growing and making another musical instrument.

by Scot Gardner

Churchill, Victoria.

GOURDS are magnificent creatures. Well, you're right, they're not really creatures but some of them look like alien pupal cases or prehistoric eggs. Most are *Lagenaria* species. They come from a long line of *cucurbitaceae* and their cousins, cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelon and squash have been proud garden plants since before black and white TV. Famous gourds from my childhood include the one strapped to Asterix's belt (containing the magic potion that gave him superhuman strength) and the holy gourd from Life of Brian ("He has given us a sign. We must follow the gourd!")

My first gourd seeds came from Joe's Pizzeria in Morwell. Joe grew the big gourds that hung beside the knots of garlic and chilli and the empty Chianti bottles in his restaurant. Joe was also the one who gave me the secret to growing gourds; that gem of traditional wisdom, handed down from father to son; the inside knowledge that has guaranteed beautiful crops of gourds in our garden. He said "Planta da seed. Water da seeds. They'll grow."

It really is that simple to grow gourds. The seeds are best planted in spring in the cooler climates and need about three or four frost-free months for the fruit to set and mature. They'll grow troppo if they have their roots in well-rotted chook poo compost but will survive in all sorts of conditions. They are very forgiving plants and grow well on a fence or trellis. The fruit are shaped by their surroundings and end up longer and straighter if allowed to hang and can buckle into bizarre and amazing shapes if left to grow on the ground.

There are so many varieties and uses of gourds that just poking seeds in the ground can get your imagination fired up. They won't get your digestive juices fired up though as they are mostly bitter and inedible. They cross-breed readily with their cousins and, as you may expect, seed saved from last year's gourds may produce offspring with bizarre shapes, colours and sizes that may not have the hard shells of true gourds.

Curing

When the plant dies off in autumn, the fruit are revealed. They need to be stored or hung in a dry, well-ventilated place for up to six months before they're ready to use.

I put nooses around the necks of mine and lynch them to the rafters of my shed. The skin of the fruit mottles and gets covered in mould as it dries and they can get a bit whiffy. A breeze turns them into a smelly bass-baritone wind chime. When dry, they're light and the seeds rattle around inside and make a passable shaker without any effort on your part.

Cleaning the gourd

The mouldy residue on the outside of a dried gourd makes it look like something deposited by a very large flightless bird. The residue can be removed easily by giving it a soak in water for fifteen minutes and rubbing the skin down with a scourer or gently scraping it with a knife blade. The gourd skin is hard, timber-like and often mottled in a very attractive way.



The gourd has long been a fashion accessory, as Scot knows.

Things to make with gourds

Once you start growing them, you may not want to stop. Luckily there are a thousand and seventeen ways you can use a gourd. The shells are dense, light and beautifully shaped sound boxes. Sealed with beeswax they can be used as drinking vessels, cups and bowls, containers, nesting boxes, bird feeders, buckets and freaky sun hats. Add beads for a rattle or shaker. Attach a membrane on a sound box part of a gourd and you've made a drum. Add a neck and strings and you have a lute, sitar, lyre, guitar or banjo. Drill holes to make a variety of flues. Join two snake gourds to make a didjeridu. Add a reed for a saxophone or clarinet or to make a *pungi* to charm any local cobras.

Making the kazoo

We're going to make a kazoo from the neck of a bottle type gourd or a narrow gourd. In Africa it's called a *noneke*. It consists of a tube (the gourd) and a vibrating membrane (in this case, baking paper).

To mark a nice even circumference around the body of a gourd, gently lower the shell into a bucket of water. The change of colour between the wet and dry surfaces can be highlighted with a pencil and the neck can be cut from the body of the shell with a carpenter's saw. Any old saw will do but the deep blade of the carpenter's saw helps keep the cut straight and neat. I'd been making *mbira* or thumb pianos from the sound box parts of the gourds and the cuts had to be neat. The necks I used to make kazoos had been off-cuts.



The mbira. Behind it are a gourd trumpet and kazoo.

The dried pith and seeds can be removed with a narrow scraper (small chisel, pocketknife, screwdriver) and the inside surface cleaned up with sandpaper. The part that attached the fruit to the plant can be cut off and sanded smooth to make the mouthpiece end. Now the neck has been refashioned as a hollow tube. One end is a mouthpiece and the other end may flare until the whole thing looks and plays like a little trumpet.

Divide the length into three and cut off the third closest to the mouthpiece. Mark the profile of this cut end on a piece of baking paper and cut it out. Glue (PVA or wood glue) the paper circle onto the cut end and use more glue to reassemble the trumpet shape. Tape or clamp the cut and leave it for a day or so.

That kazoo is finished by drilling a couple of airholes on the mouthpiece side of the paper membrane so any air sung into the kazoo doesn't rupture the paper.

Playing the kazoo

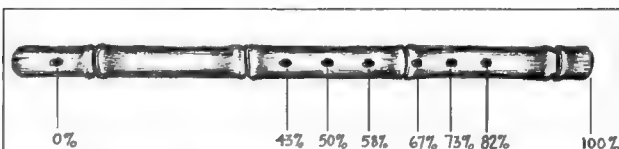
Now sing! Hold the mouthpiece end to your lips and sing some notes. The paper buzzes and distorts the sound turning everything you say or sing into grungy buzz music. A gourd kazoo is great accompaniment to garden variety blues. Make a few for the family and add a buzz section to your homegrown orchestra.



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Flute correction

In Scot's previous article about growing and making your own bamboo flute, he became so enamoured of his beloved bamboo that he mixed up a couple of the numbers in the accompanying drawing. When you make your flute, be sure to calculate the hole positions with this drawing, and not the one published in the original article.

Further information

For gourd seeds and information, talk to:
The Gourdfather, John Van Tol, PO Box 298, East Maitland. NSW 2323 Australia. Phone/fax : 02 4933 6624
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Questions & Answers

with Jackie French



Sadly, Jackie's computer upped and died over Christmas: "Well, not all that sadly as I adore my new one, and the old one was just about steam-powered. But when it died it took all the last lot of Q and A with it. So this is, shall we say, a dieter's Q and A. Not many calories but nice and nutritious," she says. If you've got a problem with blotches on apricots, peach leaves, noses, toeses, rats in the ceiling or fleas in the bed, email Jackie at info@earthgarden.com.au.

How do I pickle walnuts?

Dear Jackie,

Back when God was a boy my brain has recorded fragments of a very beautiful scene involving a huge walnut tree . . . beneath the tree was a bath tub filled with fresh walnuts swimming in vinegar (I assume) stained black from the tannins in the walnuts. I also recall tasting these things on a later date. They were rich and earthy and whacked you in the back of the palate. In a word, just magic! So as you can imagine I'm eager to get my hands on the recipe so as to relive this lovely memory. Thanks for your time, Colette.

Dear Colette,

We pickled the young walnuts so we could get some kind of crop before the white cockatoos ate them! Nowadays we wait for the white goshawk to eat the white cockatoos. Pickled walnuts are complicated to make and take ages but, as you remember, are well worth it — a flavour quite unlike any other, incredibly piquant. But they also depend on having your own walnut trees, as any walnuts you buy are far too old to pickle.

Pickled walnuts

Pick the walnuts while still soft enough for a darning — that is, thickish — needle to be poked through them, shell and all.

Prick the walnuts all over with the darning needle. This will take ages and is best done with a friend! Your hands will turn yellow then brown then black unless you

wear gloves and, even then, some of the dye may leak through. Your hands will stay dyed for weeks.

Place them in a container with a lid — *not* aluminium, or anything enamelled where some of the enamel might have worn away, or in copper — earthenware, stainless steel or plastic purpose-made cookware is best.

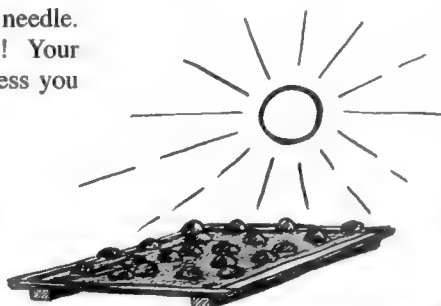
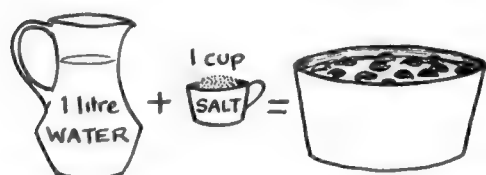
Cover them with a brine made of one cup of salt to one litre of water. Let them stand for six days, and stir two or three times a day. Make sure the walnuts are totally covered in the brine, and not so closely packed that they touch. Some will float on top, which is why they must be stirred several times a day.

Drain, wash them in fresh water, then cover with more brine for another three days.

Drain off the brine. Now spread the walnuts out in the sun till they are totally black. I laid mine on clean aluminium foil, but racks are even better. Turn them over every day so that each side gets enough sunlight. This may take two or three days or even a couple of weeks.

Wash the walnuts in fresh water to remove any dust. Sterilise enough bottles so they fit in easily — again, not crammed in, but about two thirds full, so they are not quite touching each other when the vinegar is poured in.

Boil up one litre of vinegar: we used cider vinegar back then, and I still think that gives the best result for these pickles, but I've used other kinds of vinegar. (I



Home-pickled walnuts are totally magic on a cheese sandwich.

mostly use white or red wine vinegar for other pickles and chutneys.) Add one tsp of salt, three tbsps of allspice and three tbsps of brown sugar (optional) per litre.

Make sure the bottles are on a wood surface so they don't crack. Pour the hot vinegar into the bottles *slowly*. At this stage I'd wear gloves and an apron *and* be really, really careful in case the bottles crack and break. Seal. Leave for three months before eating, to give the pickle time to penetrate and lose its savageness. If you try them too soon they'll bite your head off.

As with all home pickling, including olives, it is just slightly possible to culture bugs that will leave you seriously ill, blind or dead. So try this at your own risk! There is no way with today's food regulations that we'd be able to sell the ones we made way back then.

But as you remember, they are very, very good indeed — far, far better than any I have bought, which taste insipid and squishy. They are totally magic on a cheese sandwich, just a bit of pickle with the cheese.

I find they last for years but, again, the longer you leave them the more the risk of something nasty developing.

Creosote and stove black

Dear Jackie,

I have two buckets of creosote from cleaning my flue a couple of times over winter. Is it safe to use in the garden? And if so how? I would also like to blacken my Nectre wood heater/stove. It is made of steel with a cast iron door. Do you know of any non-toxic way to do this? Thanks for a great read. All the best, Jessica Yuille.

Dear Jessica,

Hi. The garden will be okay with the creosote, but you may not be! It's *very* carcinogenic — use gloves and protective clothing. We get the stuff from our chimney too.

I scatter a very little of it around fruit trees. The grass and other stuff grows green and lush around them, but I am wary of *anything* that is too concentrated. But sparsely used, it's good. You can also re-burn the creosote — creosote burns well, which is why a build up is so dangerous in the chimney. Do burn it in a strong fire though, with a good updraught up the chimney.

About blackening a wood stove: we use horrible stuff from the supermarket. If you lean against the stove after it's been used you get black too! The old recipes I have for cleaning the stoves all have ingredients like: 450 gm bitumen, 280 ml linseed oil, 140 ml turps, mix in an old tin, apply while stove is warm. (I'd rather not!) When dry polish with 570 ml benzene, 30 gm crushed resin, finely ground black lead.

Paint on quickly, polish with a soft brush. To be honest, these recipes are not ones I wish to experiment with! If any reader has better (non-toxic) ones, I'd love to hear about them. All the best, Jackie.

Sexing chook eggs?

Hi Jackie,

I'm not sure if you can help me but I'm trying to find out if anyone knows how to sex a chook egg and Jackie came to mind. If this is something Jackie knows about a reply would be great.

Thanks, Debbie.

Dear Debbie,

Apart from various tests and dissections which involve cracking the egg — which isn't much use if you want a chicken — the only way I have ever heard of is dowsing, as in dowsing for water. But each practitioner seems to have a different technique: some dangling a wedding ring on a chain, others use a wooden pole like water divining, some say if a string goes to the right it's female and others to the left and so on.

I've met five chicken dowzers. They all had very good luck with their local eggs but when I brought them eggs from my chooks the results were worse than random guessing, so I strongly suspect they had just learnt what was the normal variation of male and female in their area. (Our area gets a very, very high proportion of males, about two in three at best, or even five out of six. We had the same ratio when we were breeding sheep — damn nuisance it was too.) Anyhow, none of the dowzers came anywhere near such a high proportion of males.

Another theory is that eggs with more rounded pointy ends are females, and very pointy ones are male. Can't confirm or deny

this one! But maybe someone else has an answer!

Getting essential oils

Dear Jackie,

I have just purchased *The Household Herb Book*. What a great publication. Thank you! Could someone tell me how to get oils from the seeds and leaves? The oils are often referred to in the book. Hoping you can help.

Sincerely,

Barbara Ritchie, Ferny Grove State High School.

Hi Barbara,

Where I refer to 'essential oils' I usually mean commercially obtainable oils. You can make naturally-



Jackie's met five chicken dowzers who all had very good luck with their local eggs but were worse than random guessing with her eggs.

scented oils by filling a jar with the leaves or flowers, then adding a bland oil like almond oil, and leaving on a warm windowsill for a few days.

The essential oils are mostly extracted by distillation. If you have a Liebig Condenser (I am remembering very far back into my science lessons here) and a Bunsen burner you can bung the leaves or flowers into one part; heat them very, very gently and collect the evaporated oils and moisture in the other. Let this lot cool and the oil should float to the surface. You can remove this with a bit of cotton wool and squeeze it into a jar. If you can find a 'gravy strainer' at a cooking shop this will separate the oil from the liquid (it is meant to separate the melted fat from the gravy).

I have also extracted essential oils with the leaves or flowers in an old kettle and rubber tubing over the spout then emptying into a jar some distance away. You do need a surprising amount of material though to get a very small amount of oil!

Note: I am not advocating any of these methods! They may lead to burnt fingers, lots of mess and possibly burning the house (school) down, so try at your own risk. Actually it's a lot of fun but buying the essential oils from craft shops, health food shops, herbal nurseries, chemists etc is a lot simpler!

All the best, Jackie.

Orris root flower colour?

Dear Jackie,

Thank you for all your information on orris root. Could you please tell me the colour of the flower so that I can identify if it is genuine orris root.

Regards, Sandra Burke.

Hi Sandra,

It's white or pale blue; there is also a deeper blue cultivar supposedly, but I haven't come across it yet. But there are other white and pale blue irises that don't give you orris root, so the colour won't tell you if it's genuine or not . . . unless of course it's purple and yellow ruffles!

All the best, Jackie.

Extra rosemary recipes

Here are a couple more rosemary recipes to add to those published in EG 130 (page 60).

Toilet pot pourri

Place a bowl of rosemary pot pourri above the toilet. Its pungent odour will overpower and freshen other smells.

Combine:

- 6 cups dried rosemary
- 1 cup dried mint
- the dried rind of two oranges and two lemons
- a little cinnamon
- half a cup of orris root.

And finally . . .

An Ancient Roman rosemary aphrodisiac. Take dried rose and violet petals, saffron, myrrh, lavender and rosemary. Mix with an equal quantity of dried vipers' flesh (red bellied black snake may do — avoid the poison glands near the head) and steep in honey.

No responsibility at all taken for the effects of this recipe! Or any of the others . . . I'm not sure how well any of them will keep for sale.

Lillipilly jam recipe

A reader wants a recipe for lillipilly jam (but I accidentally trashed the email!).

Pick the fruit before it is fully coloured — lillipilly goes a bit turpentine-y when fully ripe. Simmer in as little water as possible till soft (if you do it gently enough you won't need much more than the water that clings to them after washing) — don't bother about twigs and so on. Strain out the fruit pulp and throw it to the chooks. Add one cup of sugar to one cup of juice and the juice of one lemon for every three cups of juice. Simmer till a little sets in a saucer. Bottle while as hot as possible. It jellies beautifully and is a glorious colour.

If the fruit is too ripe, it may not set as well and if it has been a very wet season it may not gel either — most fruit won't in wet times because it won't have developed

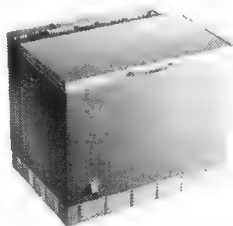
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enough pectin. To counteract this you can add extra pectin to help it set but add it with the sugar. Pectin added to fruit before it has been cooked and softened hardens the fruit (as does sugar) and it won't cook down to a pulp.

Chilli jam and burdock seeds

Hi Jackie,

Two queries if you don't mind. Thanks. Firstly, where can I get burdock seeds? (I thought they were weeds). Secondly, a couple years ago I had a recipe of yours for chilli jam but have mislaid it. I would really appreciate it if you would include this in your EG column. Ta! Have had many giggles at your writings — you keep on entertaining us and teaching at the same time. Personally I've learnt a lot, and I wish you much more success yet. Peace, happiness and great gardening and writing too.

Regards, Val Smetheram.

Dear Val,

Burdock used to be a weed (so was lettuce, all bitter and straggly, and the ancestor of cabbages growing rank and weedy by Northern beaches). High yielding, tender strains were selected by the Japanese (I think they call it gobo though I may be wrong). So nowadays you can get the weed burdock and the vegie burdock.

I've bought my burdock seeds from the following two seed nurseries, though other good mail order places sell them too. I bought from two to compare the strains, but they were identical: once you have burdock you don't need to buy more seeds, as a gone to seed burdock produces a few thousand seeds and they ALL germinate. They're not far from a weed in that respect.

Chilli jam

There are two sorts of chilli jam: the jam as in scones and jam and cream, and the sweet chilli relish.

Chilli jam to eat with scones and a touch of fire

5 large apples (Granny smiths are good), chopped, not peeled or cored

1-5 chillies, depending on heat wanted

juice of two lemons

about 2 cups water

2 cups sugar.

Cook apples and chillies in the water till soft. Strain out all juice, throw solids to the chooks. For every cup of juice add 1 cup of sugar, plus the lemon juice. Simmer till it goes glug! glug! and a little dripped onto a cool plate stays humped up and jelly like, not spreading over the plate. Bottle and seal.

Chilli jam as in hot relish

4 large red capsicums, chopped and seeded

4-10 chillies, depending how hot you like your jam, chopped and seeded

4 tbs palm sugar (brown sugar is okay)

6 tbs peanut oil (I use olive as the other flavours are so strong no one notices)

3 tbs fish sauce

3 tbs lemon or lime juice

6 cloves garlic, chopped

2 onions, peeled and sliced.

Place the oil in a pan and sauté the onions, garlic, capsicum and chillies till very very soft. This has to be done slowly and for a long time to really get the caramel flavours of long cooked food. If you only have a small frying pan — ours is enormous — cook the bits separately, as if the pan is too small the liquid pools rather than evaporates and everything will boil in the juices, not sauté. You can't hurry a good chilli jam, so this bit will take at least half an hour. Now add the other ingredients and again, cook slowly, stirring often, for about 20 minutes. Turn off the heat. Either mash well, or (easier) blend it roughly, though the operative word here is roughly — you DON'T want a smooth mess.

Store in sterilised bottles in the fridge or other cool place. Throw out if it looks or smells odd or different in any way. I have no idea how long it's safe to keep — ours has kept in the fridge for about three weeks, by which time we have guzzled the last jar, but it should keep longer.

Some people prefer a sweeter jam, so more sugar can be added, or like a more liquid, more sauce-like jam, in which case double the oil and lemon/lime juice quantities. But the recipe above suits us.

Chilli jam is great on just about anything. My favourite is on potato cakes.

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Compost Toilet – Part 2

Following his introduction to constructing his economical composting toilet in EG 131, Nigel concludes this series by dealing with the seat, vent stack and absorption pit. If you plan to build the device you should negotiate its use with your local council.

by Nigel Jones
Taroona, Tasmania.

The toilet seat

The toilet bowl and chute will not support the weight of anyone sitting on it. A box or bench as shown will have to be constructed over it. A simple lid may be used to cover the hole or a conventional timber or plastic toilet seat can be fastened to the top of the box. Make sure there is some clearance between the top of the toilet bowl and the underside of the timber box and drill at least six holes, 25 mm or greater in diameter, into the box as shown. These should have scraps of flywire fastened behind them.

The vent stack

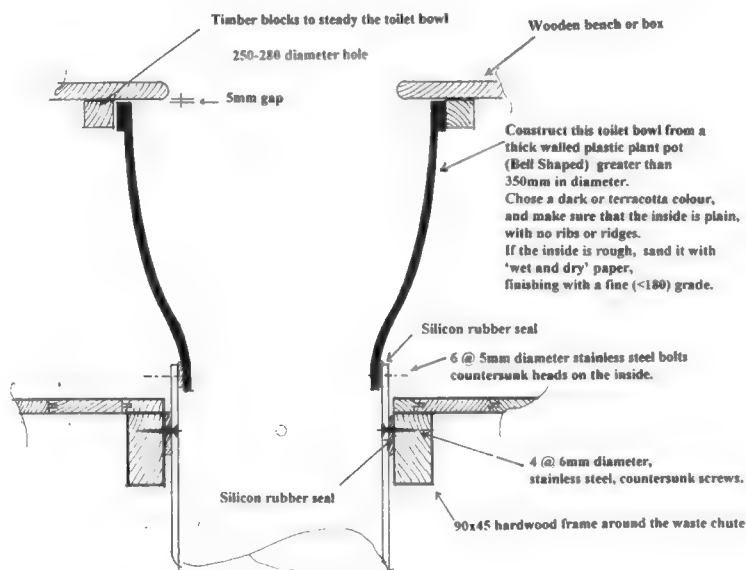
To ensure a reliable source of air to the chamber a vent stack or chimney must be installed. The stack may be made of steel or PVC pipe and should extend at least three metres above the top of the chamber and 600 mm higher than any part of the roof of the building that is within 3.6 metres of it.

If this stack is more than 4 metres above the chamber and is fitted with a continuous fan (see page 59) then it may be 100 mm in diameter, otherwise it should be 150 mm in diameter.

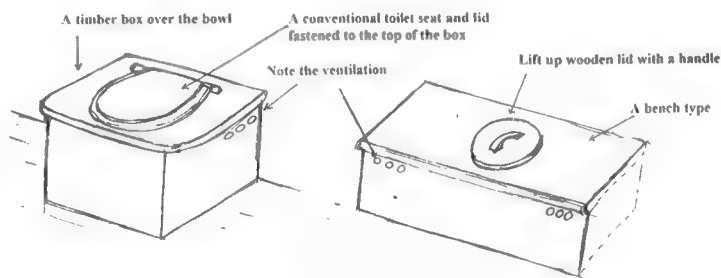
Fix the stack well, using pipe saddles, not by fixing through it. A cap and insect screen will be needed – see the drawings for one simple option.

The T-junction and inspection opening are necessary as without this little sump water can condense inside the stack in cold weather and gather against the fan.

The stack should be joined to the chamber by a section of flexible hose 65 mm in diameter. PVC hose can be used for this, or a lightweight flexible pipe such as electrical conduit, or “air seeder” pipe (this is ag. pipe without the holes). Try to keep it as short as practicable and avoid droops and bends.



Section through the toilet bowl



Two options for a toilet seat

Figure 1. Toilet bowl installation and seat options.

This pipe, and any other joints that have to be dismantled when the chambers are changed, can be sealed with grey PVC duct tape.

Fans

Until recently composting toilets relied on a “chimney effect” within the stack for ventilation, but all commercial models now have a small fan running continuously to keep air moving.

Fans, such as those used to cool electronic equipment, such as power supplies to computers* are usually used. These are readily available and often run continuously for several years, but if one is fitted inside the T-junction as shown it should be secured with a neutral cure silicone rubber, as should the reducer. Sooner or later this will have to be dismantled.

* Fans designed to cool CPUs are too small.

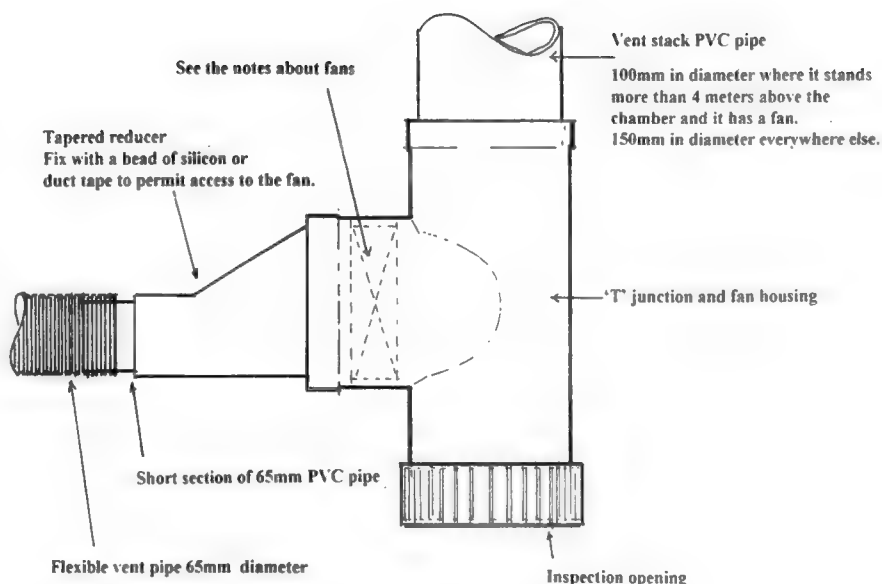
Or

You could consider one of several, small inline fans designed for conventional toilet vents that are now on the market. These can be connected to the end of the reducer, not inside it. A fan called "Odorout" comes to mind, but there are others.

By constantly drawing air down through the toilet pedestal, the use of a fan inside the vent stack is supposed to ventilate the room or building that the system is installed in. However, I still think the room or building needs to be pretty draughty. These small fans run on 12 volts and may be powered by a small plug-in transformer, or from a battery charged by photovoltaic cells.

Or

A more traditional method to increase air flow, though only during daylight hours, is the solar chimney. These do work on



Details of the vent stack

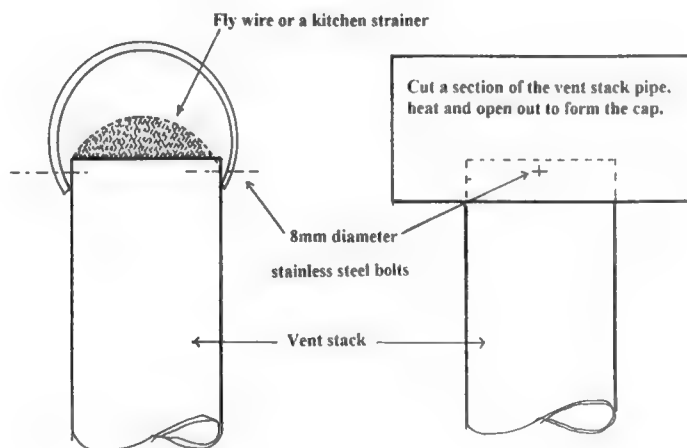


Figure 2. Vent stack arrangements.

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cloudy days too, but not during heavily overcast or foggy weather.

Basically the sun warms the black painted section of the stack and the heated air inside rises, sucking more up after it to continue the process.

Wrapping the polycarbonate sheet around the stack improves efficiency in cold or cloudy weather; and the rings above and below the covered section keep the rain out, the heat in and discourage spiders.

Make sure that the polycarbonate sheet is well tied to the stack. Soft iron tie wire every 600 mm or so should do this.

Solar chimneys can be built to work 24 hours a day but these are massive and heavy structures. The one described above will improve the efficiency of the vent stack but should not be used to replace a fan unless there is simply no

Place a spare 'lid' onto the top of the chamber secure this with duct tape or simply place a few bricks on the lid

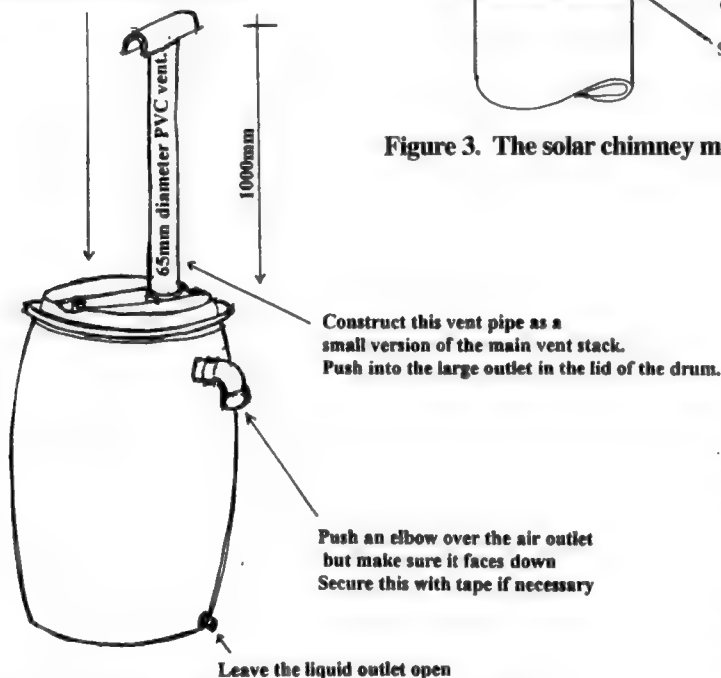


Figure 4. Details of the 'resting' composting toilet.

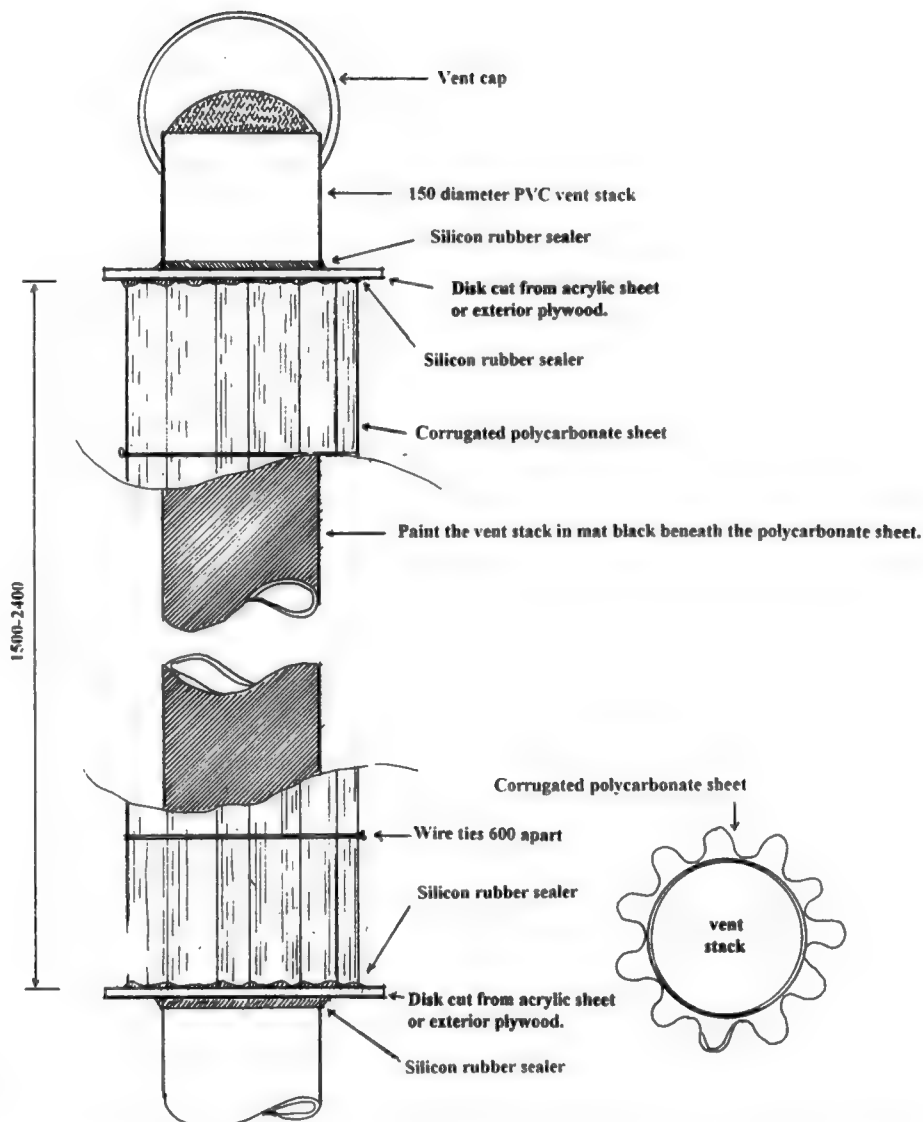


Figure 3. The solar chimney method of increasing air flow through the system.

alternative.

No formally approved composting toilet system operates without a fan.

The absorption pit

Finally, construct the absorption pit as illustrated. The area chosen for the absorption pit should be below the chamber, so that it will drain, not beneath or closer than five metres to any path, driveway, drain, water-course or the property boundary, where these things are below the pit.

If there is no opportunity for an absorption pit, it is possible to use a holding tank as a substitute, emptying this to a hole dug some distance from the house. A plastic 20-litre drum may be adequate; this can be sunk into

the ground to conceal it and to guarantee a fall from the chamber. Protect this drum from the sun.

The sizes shown are suggestions only, but should be adequate for a busy family. If the toilet is used intermittently, or if there are less than three people in the household, you can probably reduce the area by half, but not the depth!

You can connect the chamber to the absorption pit with garden hose, but if the distance is greater than, say, five metres and the installation is permanent, it is probably better to use 20 mm black poly pipe.

Looking after your composting toilet

1. Before you use an empty chamber, fill up to the level shown with sticks, prunings, blackberry or other rough vegetation. This will improve the drainage and ventilation while making the chamber easier to empty.
2. Don't put things that won't decompose into the system: paper, tissues and tampons are OK; cigarette ends, band-aids and plastic bags are not.
3. To guarantee good aerobic decomposition the correct ratio of carbon to nitrogen is required. Human excrement usually has too much nitrogen and not enough carbon. It is best to add carbon-rich materials such as wood shavings, vegetable scraps, straw, sawdust or ripped up bits of cardboard as you use the system.

As a rule of thumb, two parts vegetable matter to one part poo seems effective. People are often reluctant to do this as they feel that they are filling the chamber too quickly, but in fact the opposite is the case. With a better carbon : nitrogen ratio the rate of decomposition increases dramatically, the pile condenses much more quickly, the compost is better quality and, perhaps most importantly, the system is less likely to smell.

4. Don't clean the bowl or toilet seat with bleach, disinfectant or any strong cleaning agent that may compromise the microorganisms that keep the system going. Soap and water works just as well.

5. There is some evidence to suggest that at low temperatures both excrement and the carbon-rich materials that you add to the system will decompose much more rapidly in the presence of urine. Separating urine for use in gardens is often practiced but probably not advisable for this and several other reasons.

• Please call Nigel Jones on 03 6227 9097 with suggestions or for more information.

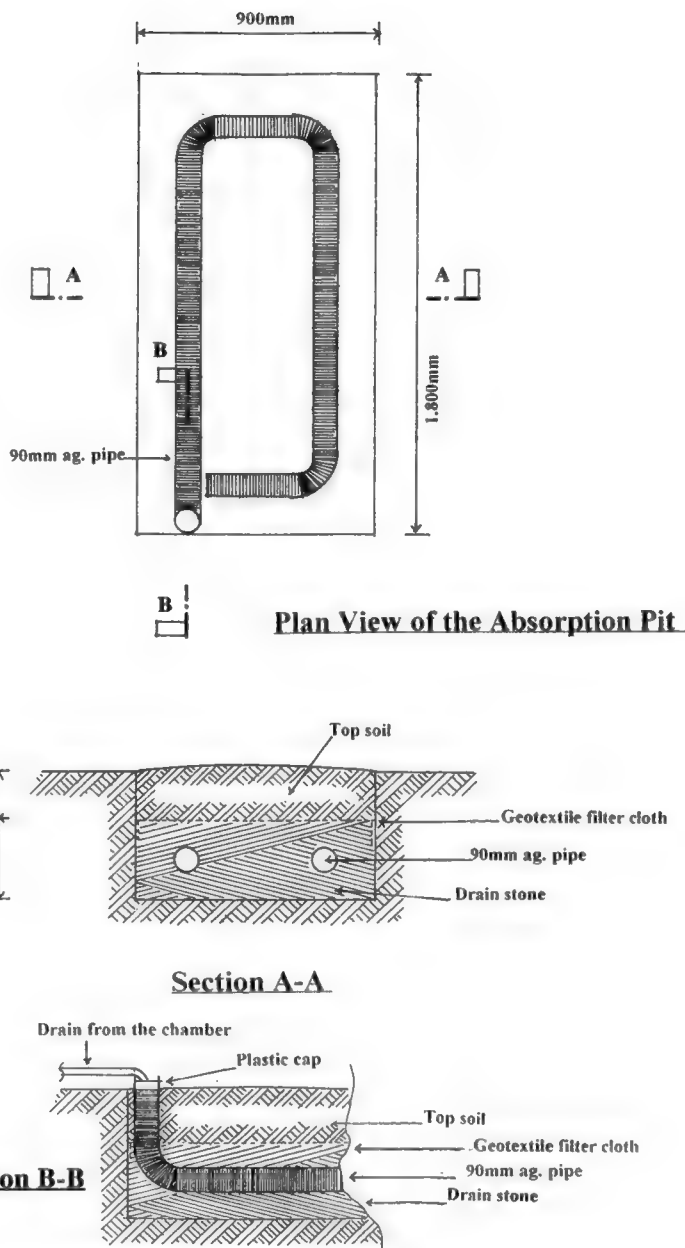


Figure 5. Absorption pit plan and sections

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Doing the Dream

— PART TWO —

In this second of three extracts from her manuscript, Jenna tells how she went about building her cottage.

by Jenna Carole

Tallaroak, Victoria.

The walls

I had never built a house before. I had renovated extensively, but never actually built a house. I had certainly never built with stone before – not with nice, regularly cut stone nor with hefty chunks of irregular granite. Maybe I had no apprehensions because I had no experience. I knew I could do it. It seemed like creative common sense to me. I had no problem with that. It had been suggested to me that I should practise by making a small shed or something. But I saw no sense in wasting time and energy. I launched right into The House, knowing it would take me a long time but knowing there was a lesson here for me – a lesson in patience: patience with my own process of learning and patience with the time it would necessarily take.

I did have the good sense to begin at the south end with the shallow sides of the half-submerged cellar, proceeding to the south-east corner and then along the eastern side knowing that this would be the back of The House – the least visible. I reckoned I could get away with a bit of inexperienced practice this way. I've never regretted this decision. I made good progress and learnt quickly and had the satisfaction of seeing The Walls of my house grow each week. Only as I sit here now, at the writing desk in the guestroom do I gaze at the south wall before me – my first wall – and smile at my inexperienced workmanship. But at least I *do* smile and the wall never looks like falling down.

Before any walling could take place, I needed to transport sand and cement to The House Site. Over the building period, good old Truckie road lifted 132 forty kg bags of mortar and 22.5 metres (45 loads) of brick sand, not to mention the rocks and all the other materials collected locally and from around Melbourne.

I decided to cut costs and use coarse brick sand rather than the more expensive greasy, fine bricklayers' sand. It made a better match with the granite rock although probably took more water and did not make a very smooth

mortar. I ended up buying and carting most of my bags of cement and truckloads of sand from a local company at a fair price and with less fuel used in the cartage. The blokes there also, I think, began to gain some respect for "the little lady" who was building the stone house and respect is not a bad thing to gain for anyone – particularly for a woman building a house.

I also decided to use a water inhibitor in the mortar mix for the first couple of rows of rocks rather than try to insert any other kind of damp course. My walls were double-sided handbuilt rock and at their base they were up to half a metre wide. The rocks themselves were large and ir-

regular making a conventional, level damp course totally impractical.

So, there I was, dressed each working day in my long-sleeved op-shop tee-shirts and overalls and boots and cap, and donning my op-shop cotton ladies dress gloves under my green rubberised work gloves, striding around The House Site, being an owner builder. Cement is a lethal substance and needs to be treated as such.

My tools of trade were very simple – mostly, my hands. I had a lightweight steel-handled spade for measuring the sand and cement into the sturdy secondhand \$15 wheelbarrow. I then mixed by hand, making sure my legs were apart and bent to take strain from my back as I mixed with a kind of gathering movement

(great for developing upper arms and breasts!). I then tipped the dry mix on to a large piece of board (about 1.5 m. x 1.5 m.), created the volcano shape and filled it with water from a hose attached to The Spring water outlet. Adding water and mixing cement with my spade was the action that finally (after 664 mixes!) caused havoc with the lower back discs.

Yes, in the face of contrary advice and appalled amazement, I hand-mixed all the mortar for my rock house! I think the thought of trying to start and maintain, on my own, a noisy fuel-driven cement mixer daunted me far more than the thought of plodding along at my own pace, with my own hands. I never had to rush or push my-



Jenna using the tools of the trade.



Far left: double sided rock wall. Left: the front door is framed. Above: the final external wall – Jenna's stone work at its best.

self as a machine completed the next mix. And my house site was QUIET. It was a time of peace for me as I built those walls, rock by rock. I learnt to love those solitary days on site, silent except for the birds and the sound of my own thoughts.

The cockies would greet me, as I arrived from The Rook in the mornings across The Hi-Ho Trail, with

screeches of delight, or annoyance, or warning, or amazement. I used to think how extraordinary all this human activity must seem to a cockatoo as it watched, from a great height, two other animals laboriously breaking up rock from one part of the bush, carting it noisily to another part and then proceeding to put it all back together again. It must make a hole in a tree seem very attractive.

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The top plates in place.

As I said, the rock walls I built were double sided, using the biggest rocks at the bottom and the smallest at the top for obvious reasons. I used a strong mortar mix throughout of three parts sand to one part cement with sufficient added water to produce a smooth, firm, cake mix. I only added the prescribed amount of water inhibitor for the first two rows of rocks. Working from one side usually gave me sufficient control over both sides of the wall but, particularly as they got higher, I always had a second scaffold on the other side to enable any tricky rock-walling and cleaning up.

The cavity between the two sides was filled as I progressed with crumbly rock, broken bricks and any other solid rubble or lumps of “gone off” cement, with the occasional rod of old iron or long bent bolts. Once the wall grew to chest height, I would put in place my “scaffold” – two steel frames that were originally school art room benches; lightweight but strong, to which I attached bench tops of strong timbers. I clambered on to these via a kitchen stool, the sort with the folding steps. I always made sure I had loaded the bench tops with a range of

rocks, a small board full of mortar and my other tools of trade – a small, broad hammer, a flat, square trowel and a triangular, pointed trowel. Getting up and down from the makeshift scaffold was probably the most perilous part of the work. It certainly kept me fit – and sometimes tetchy.

I didn’t actually use the trowels much. I used a small metal, short-handled shovel to move cement around and my gloved hands did the placement of the daubs of mortar, the fitting of the rocks and the “pointing up” afterwards. Pointing up is the removal of unnecessary mortar from between the rocks and some people take great pains to use the point of a trowel to create clean, sharp lines between the rocks – some even paint the mortar later to make a feature of it. But I had chosen to use a mortar much the same

colour as the rocks and my rocks were so irregular that trying to draw lines between them was often impossible. So I used my gloved fingers to point up and afterwards, when the mortar had firmed, I would hose the new wall, washing off any messy cement. The result was a very *au naturelle* look – rocks that just happened to be joined by mortar.

I found I had to be careful with the water. Once cement is too wet, it oozes everywhere and it won’t stay in place and will dry very weak, thus compromising the strength of the wall. The structural chemistry of concrete or mortar can be weakened by water. On winter mornings, when the sand was already wet, I often made the mistake of adding too much water. Much easier to add a little more than to try and take it away.

I began to learn quickly how to jigsaw the rocks, trying to use the one flat side they might have to best advantage and making sure that joining lines of mortar didn’t run vertically. I had read somewhere that the technique of laying rocks should be as close as possible as that of laying bricks. My rocks were nothing like bricks but I did learn to be patient and, in the end, I used every rock, finding places for even the most difficult ones. Mind you, a lot of really rebellious rock got dropped into the cavity.

I would work along about a three-metre length of wall, bringing it up to waist height – or windowsill height – along a whole side of The House. Then I would go back and bring it up to chest height. Then the scaffolding would go into place and be moved along as I brought The Walls up to about 2.3 metres. The plan was to complete The Walls to top plate height then put all the top plates on in one process. And that’s another story!

• Jenna’s illustrated book, ‘Doing the Dream’, can now be purchased by sending a \$25 cheque or money order to her at PO Box 411, Seymour VIC 3661, including your return address.



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THE HOME DAIRY

Recipes for too much milk

If you're milking your own cow you may end up with a lot of milk. What to do with it? Here Maureen tells how she makes butter, yoghurt and ice-cream.

by Maureen Larter

Cedar Party, New South Wales.

AS A proud new self-sufficiency farmer, you have successfully milked your cow. Now what do you do? The first thing is to strain it through sterilised double layered muslin, (scald with boiling water and hang to dry). In the same situation, I bought a metre of muslin and cut three lengths, folded the material to get a rectangle approximately 25 cm x 20 cm and stitched a hem right around the edges to stop fraying. These I use on a rotational basis. I also have several jugs with which I do the same.

Very soon you will realise that milking a cow morning and night, or even only mornings, gives you an awful lot of milk and the shelves in the fridge start to buckle and there is no room for anything else. There is only so much that you can drink, so what do you do with the rest? Let's give you some ideas.

The jugs of milk should be left to stand in the fridge for a day or two. The cream will separate out and come to the top. The next job is to carefully skim this cream off and place it in another jug so that it can mature a little. The cream can then be used to make butter (as well as using some to give you whipping cream for those home grown strawberries!).

To make butter, place approximately one litre of matured, cold cream in a large bowl (when you whip it, it will expand). With your mixer whip this cream until it separates out into globules of yellow fat and bluish-green buttermilk. The cream will shrink, and change colour and texture. Use only the lowest speed on your electric mixer (or use your muscles with a hand beater). If you are having trouble, maybe you are mixing too fast and the mixture is continually reconstituting into ordinary cream. Sometimes the temperature of the mix may not be correct. This could take quite a bit of time, from ten minutes to one hour. Place this mixture in a fine sieve and allow the buttermilk to drain off. You can keep this to cook with if you wish.

Place the fat from the sieve back in your bowl and continue to work this with a couple of wooden paddles, pressing and consolidating it as you go. Drain off again. Run cold water over the fat in the sieve and wait for it to drain again. Eventually you will find you can't get much more buttermilk out of the fat, and it will start to lump and look like butter (which it is!). Sprinkle with salt (if you

wish – it helps to preserve it, but you may prefer unsalted butter) and continue to pat and mould the butter. Any buttermilk that comes off, however small the amount, should be drained off. Put the remaining butter lump into a suitable container and place in the fridge. It should be used fairly quickly after you have finished it, as I find I can't get all the buttermilk out by hand, and the butter will go rancid after about three or four days. In winter I have had it last a week. Any extra you make can be frozen for later if desired.

I use some of the milk to make yoghurt. I have a yoghurt-making flask and use recipes I found in Bill Connor's book, *Towards Self-Sufficiency*. Otherwise I admit to using the yoghurt mix (Easiyo) bought from the supermarket to obtain my first natural yoghurt in order to get my "starter" for the next batch. To flavour the yoghurt, I experiment with all sorts of things. Making the syrup with jam (apricot, strawberry, raspberry, etc. – all homemade) and boiling water, and then cooling it produces a beautiful yoghurt.

I also make my own ice-cream. Here is an easy and cheap recipe.

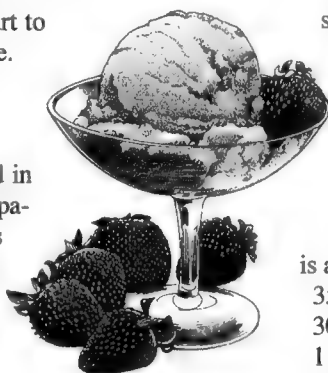
350 mL (1-1/2 cups) of milk
300 mL cream
1 tin (395 gm) condensed milk
1 tsp vanilla essence
optional flavourings

Mix all ingredients together. Place in freezer. When ice crystals form, take out of freezer and remix. Refreeze. Or you could use an electric ice-cream churn which you can buy at any electrical store for about \$100. This recipe makes about two litres.

Without flavourings, this makes a delicious vanilla ice-cream. You can also add a raw egg or two (if you have chooks). This will make your ice-cream gorgeous and rich. Optional flavourings could be fresh strawberries (mashed) or chocolate chips or diced apricots or crushed honey crumble or raisins and rum essence, etc. etc. It's exciting to try all sorts of things.

The only thing I haven't mentioned is cheese. I have tried cream cheese, cottage cheese and cheddar cheese. These use a lot of milk (cheddar uses about 9 or 10 litres for about 250 gm finished cheese).

I was not very successful with this, and I am going to lessons shortly, so will let you know how I go, and what I learn.



The Untidy Gardener

Inspired by both Italian and Japanese traditions of vegetable growing, Val discovered her own approach was slightly different.

by Val Harris

Albany, Western Australia.

WHEN I was a very young child I was exposed to two completely different types of garden. My grandfather had a farm, and his Italian ancestry meant that he grew lots of vegetables, but tended to mix them all up in deeply dug beds that he topped up with lots of organic matter. He planted flowers among the vegies to attract predatory insects to police his crop, and filled in the gaps where he had harvested a plant with something new. This process meant that there was always something yummy to bring to the table, and the mature plants sheltered the new ones coming on. He did not limit his vegetables to the vegie patch: the more attractive ones like statuesque artichokes, and red-legged silver beet found their way into the ornamental garden and did not look a bit out of place. He said that they were as pretty as any of the flowers, with the bonus that you could eat them too!

His garden was a paradise for a small child. There were shiny cherry tomatoes nestled with fragrant basil, and baby carrots peeked out from earthed up mounds between other plants, begging to be stolen and eaten before they were fully grown. He did not believe that pesticides should be anywhere near stuff that we were going to eat. He believed that a healthy plant could survive some pests and still leave enough for us. He encouraged us to hunt

caterpillars and we were very good at it, receiving as a bonus an education about what kind of moth or butterfly they all turned into as we kept some in jars.

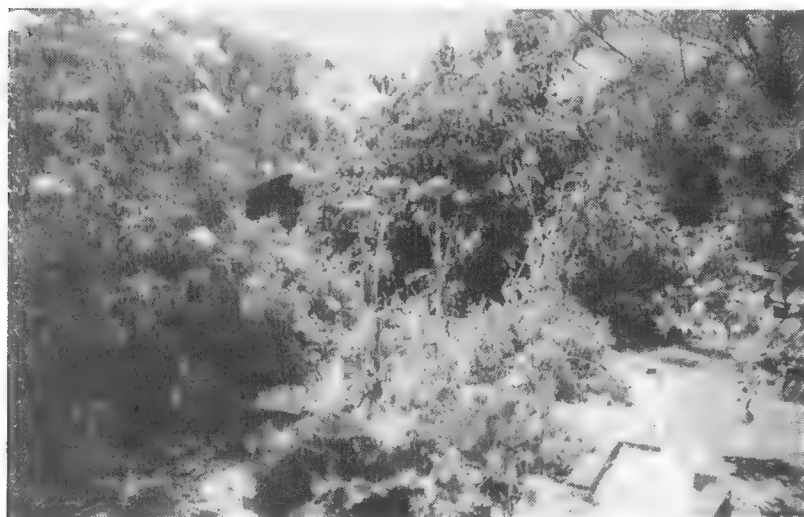
Then my mother met a nice young Japanese couple who ran a commercial market garden. They had a property blessed with good alluvial soil that ploughed to a fine dark tilth, and produced abundant crops in seemingly endless manicured and regimented rows. The family were meticulous in their care of the garden. Everyone from grandmother and cousins down to young children had their own chores to keep the plants in top condition. Their success was in their dedication to quality. Their garden and vegetables were pesticide free, too. The young couple taught my sister and I how to make origami animals and our reward was a tasty carrot, or a handful of sweet, crisp peas. We thought it was great!

As we moved around the world, and my mother established gardens successfully in many different soil types and conditions, there were certain basics that I learned from both the jungle-like garden of my grandfather, and the neat market garden. Here are a few of them ...

Assess the neighbourhood first, and see what is growing well in other gardens. Familiarise yourself with the seasons, and extremes of temperature in your area, and choose your vegetable garden site with both shelter and sun in mind. Use plenty of organic matter when planting and water well to establish your plants and you won't go far wrong.

Time passed and I finally had a chance to have my own garden. At first, fired with enthusiasm, I planned a meticulous garden, well ordered and tidy. Visits to National Trust properties in our area had given me a vision of a well-planned kitchen garden. I could see it in its homespun glory. But my grandfather's influence was too strong, and whether it was nature or nurture, I was a hopelessly untidy case.

It all started out well enough. Vegetables were planted in rows and by height and type, but as things matured my plan went askew. I kept seeing new and interesting vegetables in catalogues, and heritage seeds caught my eye. I found myself filling gaps with a mix of root and leaf vegetables. I ran out of room, so I dug up bits of lawn and put in deep beds of straw, compost, manure and a bit of blood and bone. In no time at all the beds were a jungle of produce that supplied not only my



Val's vegie garden. L-R: elderberry, raspberry, artichoke, rhubarb, celery, tomatoes, mulberry, fig, banana passionfruit (on fence), lemon, silver beet. (There's a lillypilly behind the mulberry too!)



Front to rear: tomatoes and celery; raspberries and strawberries; zucchini, melons and potatoes; Jerusalem artichokes, beetroot and button squash. The fig, mulberry and pear trees are all fruiting well now.

family but the neighbours as well. By now, I had four beds on the go, and was able to rotate crops (like potatoes), so that I did not have them in the same bed two years running, to minimise disease problems. One bed was for perennials like artichokes and woody herbs. The other beds had a succession of assorted vegetables all year round. My neighbours didn't mind the overabundance at all.

Now that I am older (much older!), I don't worry any more about the neatness, I just plant wherever I have gaps. I start out with a basic layout, but as the symmetry disintegrates it all seems to work out in the end. My only concession to some sort of order is to put taller plants in the middle of the bed, and shorter ones to the edges. The year following on from my potatoes, I top up the soil and grow zucchinis or beans and they do well. I also plant more silver beet than I need and let some mature. A mature silver beet plant is a marvel. They grow very tall, and continue to produce good sized leaves for ages; then as they bolt the smaller leaves are of gourmet quality. I always have plenty of leaves for the chooks as well as for the family, and when the seed heads form, I give them to the poultry too.

I can afford to experiment, as if something dies it is not a catastrophe, and now have a capsicum plant that is in its second year, even surviving frost. My Jerusalem artichokes have a science fiction triffid-like quality as they tower over everything else, and the flowers are just as beautiful to me as the root vegetable they produce. Here and there in my ordinary plant beds I have dotted the odd pomegranate and artichoke, as these plants are very attractive in their own right.

I even turned a near disaster into something useful. My wonderful tamarillo nearly blew down in last winter's gales. I tied it to an established tree with a long rope, then took the opposite strain with another rope on a star picket. The tamarillo survived and is producing well, even at its new lazy angle. In the meantime, my Nelly Kelly passionfruit further down the bed found the rope, running along it with vigour, and it now looks as if I planned to have this wonderful support for the vine. Plus the passionfruit vine is at a comfortable height for picking the prolific fruit. Even potential disasters can have their perks.

So as my garden enters its fourth year, the fruit trees are filling up with a good assortment of fruit for fresh eating and for preserving. I have added gooseberries (both Cape and English), blackcurrants and redcurrants to the perennial beds, and the herb garden is a mini jungle. I have had to do little work this year compared with the first three years as the basic structure of the garden is complete now. All I do is add new plants as old ones are finished and provide feed and water. (The sheep and chickens help with the feeding part as they supply manure for my well-rotted compost). It is really that easy.

So leave a few wild bits in your garden, let a few plants seed for the birds and don't worry if your friends shake their heads in pity at your seemingly overgrown and rampant garden beds. They will not complain about the free vegies from your ultra-productive plot!

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Earth People Write continued from page 6

Keeping away mozzies

Dear 'Earth Garden' folk,

Firstly I would just like to congratulate you for distributing the best magazine I have ever read. Honestly. Without a doubt. My husband, our 11 month old and I have just moved from Sydney to a tiny, tiny village west of Coffs Harbour called Ulong. It was in Ulong I discovered Earth Garden magazine, in the rundown old theatre which doubles as the corner shop/post office. Some of the magazines I found dated back to 1992! As I said above, it is the best magazine I have ever laid eyes on. Please can you send me a form to subscribe to you and let me know somewhere local I can buy your magazine. One question I have is regarding 'mozzies'. How do I keep them away? We only have half of our house with screens on the windows and, although I am not affected greatly, my little boy is covered in bites! Thank you.

Amy Dummigan, Ulong, NSW.

Dear Amy,

The dreaded mozzie battle continues. The bad news is that you will never beat them without screens on all windows, or at the very least cotton nets over your beds. Make sure there is no still water lying around near your house, such as pet water bowls, pretend water gardens, puddles or the like, and try planting wormwood or lavender outside your doors and windows to repel them. Good luck!

—Alan.

Rammed earth query from Mongolia

Hello,

I have just received Green House Plans. Many thanks. It is full of helpful information. However I was disappointed that rammed earth construction was only mentioned in passing, and none of the houses featured used this method. So I scrutinised your catalogue — again no title dedicated to rammed earth. It gets a mention Angela Dean's book. Is there an Australian book available on this method? Congratulations on the good work.

I am sure this is the first inquiry you have received from Inner Mongolia where my husband is grassland/animal husbandry/environmental consultant to an Australian aid project in the land of Ghengis Khan.

Sue Williams, mongusue@yahoo.com.au.

Dear Sue,

There is an excellent section on rammed earth in the newly-reprinted 'Earth Garden

Building Book'. It will answer all your questions. And yes, you are right; although we have subscribers in many countries throughout the world, this is the first time I've had a query from Inner Mongolia!

—Alan.

Moving out west

Dear Alan and team,

We have moved a further 620 km north-west of Roma. It's a small town of approximately 100 people where children can still play cricket and other games out on the street and be safe, and everyone looks out for each other. I am looking forward to the challenge of starting a reasonably self sufficient garden, orchard and poultry again. It's going to be a challenge as summers are always up around 40°C and often higher. I have been reading Earth Garden for approximately 30 years as I used lots of ideas from it while raising the children. It's refreshing to see the younger generation jumping from the 'instant' lifestyle and going back to the challenge and satisfaction of working for your needs.

Jenny Markwell, Isisford, Qld.

Every SCRAP helps

Dear 'Earth Garden',

I am writing to thank you very much for the EcoTax contribution to SCRAP from the EG 128. Thank you for your awareness regarding paper usage and your self-imposed tax to this end and for donating the money across some of the many worthy groups in the community which are working as we are for the future of the planet against those looming forces of darkness.

SCRAP has been having very difficult times over the past year with the paper recycling we started and spread across half the schools in NSW and the ACT as well as over 1000 other government departments, agencies, and NGOs. This resource has now been taken from us by the very industry partner we served for the previous 12 years (VISY). They were aided and abetted by the NSW Labor Government and its lackeys in the bureaucracy who handed VISY an exclusive statewide contract. The more we acted against this the more we have been deliberately sidelined by the bureaucracy.

This has affected our programs to schools with no funding to continue them and an ever increasing tendency by government departments to centralise such work under their direct control. This is despite the fact that we initiated environmental auditing in schools over a decade ago and have led the way for most of this time on such activities.

Consequently, it was a great relief to

find we had been remembered by some people and the \$300 will come in handy in revamping our website to attract more people to our programs of Green buying, environmental auditing and implementing programs of change. Thanks again — more power to you!

Peter Carroll, SCRAP, Holsworthy, NSW, email: support@scrapltd.com.au, website: www.scrapltd.com.au.

Stanthorpe spud tips

Dear 'Earth Garden',

Friendly greetings. I do enjoy our magazine. In reply to G Huddleston's 'Potato Mystery' in EG 131's EPW, you should try well rotted compost and hardwood sawdust, added in winter and worked into the soil. Trench in early spring, plant varieties suited to the area with a sprinkle of potash and a soaking of seaweed solution. Water every three days after shoots appear, and spray with seaweed solution several times through the growing period. Of course heavy mulching with hay or straw is essential. I manage ten to 20 good sized spuds from Kennebec, Pontiac, Sabago, Desire and Rideau, to mention some a few varieties.

Bill Humble, Stanthorpe, Qld.

Hydraulic ram plans?

Dear editor,

Do you have know how I could obtain plans to build a 'village ram' as mentioned in *The Australian Self-Sufficiency Handbook*, page 267 (1999 Edition)? We have a bottom and top dam and would like to use a pump that doesn't use any fuel or electricity.

Walter Burgess, Lethbridge, Vic.

Dear Walter,

This information came from the Village Technology Handbook, published by Volunteers in Technical Assistance (Vita) and the ISBN is 086619004X. A 'Google search' on the internet at your local library should give more information.

—Alan.

Better threshing method?

Dear 'Earth Garden',

I like to grow organic grains, with spelt being my favourite. I also grow oats, rye, a variety of barley grains and others as I can get them. However, my problem is in the 'threshing'. Does anyone know of a way, other than a flail, for small growers like me to separate the hull from the grain?

Spelt has a particularly tight hull with a few layers and is a real 'bugger' to get off without a machine. If anyone can help, my email is below. Thanks in anticipation,
Lindsay Houston belfastscotsirish@hotmail.com.

Port Augusta continues the tradition

Dear editor,

While at the Baxter demonstration, I became aware of a nasty situation in Port Augusta, the nearest town. The original owners of the land suffer from considerable, sustained abuse and ill treatment. There have been instances of physical attacks. For example, one young woman was left near-dead after being accosted by a couple of drunken rednecks. There was nothing about it in the media, but there was a demonstration in Port Augusta too. People at the Baxter demonstration were asked to join the Aboriginal people in a march. The locals saw this as a measure of protection against attack.

The issue? One particular spot has been an Aboriginal meeting place for perhaps tens of thousands of years. Now, the local council has granted a development permit. Having had everything else taken away from them, the Aborigines will now lose their favourite location for gathering and passing time. Earth Garden readers may see fit to lobby the Port Augusta Council, the South Australian Government, and the Federal government to support them.

Bob Rich, bobrich@bobswriting.com.

Looking for contacts

Dear 'Earth Garden',

I am looking for work experience in sustainable living systems. I have moved down from Queensland, where I was a bio-dynamic farmer, to Victoria. I would like to get some contacts in the eco building, sustainable living area but am not sure where to start. Could you please advise me where to go from here.

Simon McLachlan, 0424 252 151, simonmc32@yahoo.com.au.

Jill's superb writing

Dear 'Earth Garden',

After all the depressing news we are treated to by the media daily, and when so many people treat each other, wild and domestic animals, and the environment with less and less consideration — what a tonic to read Jill Redwood's article in EG 131 regarding the moonlit birth of the Clydesdale foal. Gentle giants they certainly are. I've been privileged to meet a couple so far in my life.

Natural cycles continue however hard man tries to harm the Earth in pursuit of gain. I am reminded of my wartime village childhood in the UK when, although bombing happened often close by, snowdrops popped through the snow in late winter, primroses appeared later, followed by bluebells smothered through the trees in

the surrounding woods.

Bluebells are my favourite memory and my small child's mind told me then that in spite of the horrors we often heard about, and the awful danger we were in, nature produced her goodies regularly and surely it was a sign that everything would be okay eventually (all my family survived). Thanks Jill for a great piece of descriptive writing. After reading it, I felt renewed! Hug your Clydesdales for me. What a superb part of the country Jill lives in — I saw it recently for the first time. Regards to all earth people.

Val Smetheram, Wishart, Qld.

R values for building insulation

Dear editor,

Like others before me I have been inspired by the ideology of strawbale homebuilding. Thanks for taking the time in putting the book and other publications together; I can appreciate how time consuming this can be. How is the R value rating reached? Is it some sort of device which measures the internal temperatures and mathematically compares them to the outside temperature? Or is it more technical than that.

During my reading of *Strawbale Homebuilding* it became apparent that the internal temperatures can tend to get a little on the warm side. I don't see this as being a problem in winter so much, but during the hot (Victorian) summer days when the days can reach high 30s and even 40 degrees celsius, I see this as some concern. Other than trying to release the hot air via some sort of roof extractor, what other, if any ideas/thoughts are you aware of, in overcoming this problem?

Jo D'Alo, jdalo@vtown.com.au.

Dear Jo,

'R values' are calculated by measuring the amount of heat that will pass from one side of a material (in this case a building material, like a strawbale wall, ceiling insulation batt, or mudbrick) to the other. This measure tells us how effectively a material insulates a house: if a large amount of heat is conducted, your house will heat up quickly in summer, and cool down quickly in winter. The higher the 'R value' the better the insulation value. So, the 'R value' is a measure of a material's resistance to the passage of heat.

Now you're going to wish you hadn't asked how it's calculated: the 'R value' is calculated by taking the number 1 and dividing it by the U value. The U value is a measurement of heat transmission. The U value of a window is measured by the number of BTUs (British Thermal Units — an imperial measure of heat) that will

pass through each square foot of area per degree of temperature difference from one side of the window to the other (the lower, the better). The inverse of that number is the R value. A brick veneer house wall has an R value of around 1.5, and a rendered strawbale wall has an R value of around 8.

I think early builders of strawbale homes in Australia (late 1990s) underestimated how 'well' strawbale building would retain heat drawn in through a lightly-insulated ceiling. I now believe that ceilings in a strawbale homes (in southern Australia) should be insulated to around R6 — way above the minimum required. Otherwise, you have superbly well-insulated walls unable to dissipate heat drawn into a house through its ceiling. If your ceiling is rated about R6, you will also be getting the greatest benefit of having those R8 strawbale walls.

Check out the clever, Australian-designed Sun Lizard: it's a brilliant solar air heater that can also reverse the air flow in summer and extract hot air from a building. For more information about the Sun Lizard, visit the website at: www.sunlizard.com.au. Good luck with your designs.

—Alan.

Mudbrick home owners' association

Dear Alan and team,

Being avid readers of your magazine *Earth Garden* and also being owner builders ourselves, we thought we would write to you. We have previously built our mudbrick home in Eltham and are currently building our retirement mudbrick home at Tolmie in north eastern Victoria. It is just in the beginning stages (slab is down and foundation bricks finished, ready to start with our mudbricks).

In September 2004 we attended a meeting at the Eltham Library which was convened by the recently formed 'Nilumbik Mudbrick Association'. We are very much concerned about the introduction of the '5 Star Energy Rating' which comes into effect on 1 July 2005.

We believe that mudbrick owners and builders, Victoria and Australia wide, need to be informed of this, as who knows, others States may follow in the future. We have just joined the Nilumbik Mudbrick Association, which is hoping to attract as many members as possible (you don't have to live in Eltham to be involved). Please keep up your good work.

Jim Thatcher and Jill Forrest, Eltham, Victoria, jimthatcher@connexus.net.au.

EARTH GARDEN REVIEWS

BOOKS AND MUSIC

Edited by Judith Gray

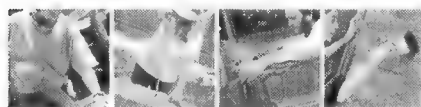


**The Earth Garden
Building Book**
by Robert Rich and
Keith Smith
Published by Penguin
Books

(With John Glassford
on strawbale)

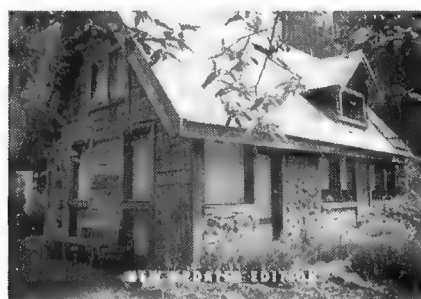
Soft cover, A4, black and
white, 315 pages
\$49.95 inc GST*

It's back! The long-awaited, updated version of the Australian owner-build-ing classic. This is the ultimate practical guide to low cost building. From mud and stone to straw, it's all here in a no fuss, simple format. This book was first published in 1987 and since then has been in hot demand. The strength



**Earth Garden
BUILDING BOOK**
Design and Build Your Own House

Robert Rich and Keith Smith



of the book is its detailed diagrams and photographs.

Bob and Keith set out to teach the inexperienced all the fundamentals they would need to build a truly original 'owner built house'. So where do you start? With a chapter on staying sane as you build. All the planning in the world can't save you from owner builder stress. That read, move on to design, safety on site and setting up. Strong foundations are essential and this book is excellent for all the different methods of establishing 'your roots'. Learn about making mudbricks, ramming earth and straw building. The chapter 'More About Mud' is where you will get all the information you need on rendering.

Earth and straw is not for everyone. If stone and timber are your bag you won't be disappointed. Learn how to split bush sandstone, build with bluestone, or perhaps make two face stone work. Then there's wood working skills and timber, post and beam construction, pole houses, building stud framed walls and, of course, flooring. Your house wouldn't be complete without a roof overhead or doors and windows — they're all covered.

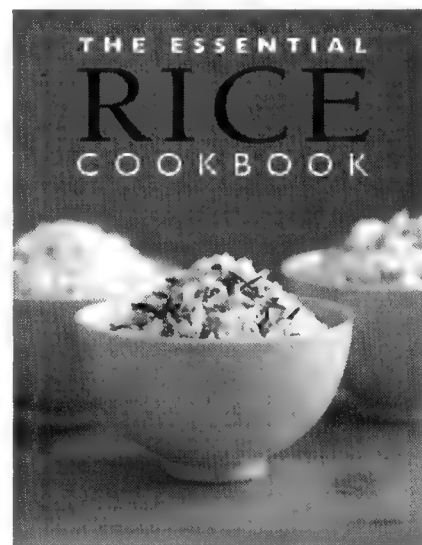
John Glassford's chapter on strawbale is true to the book's commitment to low cost housing. John describes his rather individual tyre footings using excellent diagrams, and details how to bale up a load bearing house. John is obviously passionate about his render. He believes there are serious problems associated with cement render, so recommends three

coats of earthen render finished with a lime putty. Having seen his work I can say that the walls of John and Sue's place just 'hum'.

The glossary of this book is just wonderful and well worth a read for starters. (Just to help you get a bit of bloke speak under your belt.) I'm glad it's back after too long out of print. This book truly is an Australian reference must-have for a whole range of specific building tasks.

**The Essential Rice
Cookbook**
Full colour, large format,
304 pages, soft cover
\$35.00 inc GST*

This truly is a comprehensive rice book book — beautifully presented and loaded with inspirational recipes from



all over the world. 'The grain of life' (rice) is the staple food for almost half the population of the world. As each different culture around the world has developed its own methods of using rice, this book has set out to examine these traditions, culture by culture.

After a detailed look at varieties, cooking rice and rice products, the book divides into Mediterranean and Middle Eastern, Europe, the Americas, India, South East Asia, China, Japan, and of course an Australian rice book wouldn't be complete without a chapter on fusion cooking.

Understanding the properties of different rice varieties helps you to choose the correct rice. For example, Basmati rice will cook into a long slender grain that is dry and fluffy. Jasmine will become soft and slightly clingy and the sticky rice (a short and round grain) will lose its shape and become sticky: great for sushi and of course puddings.

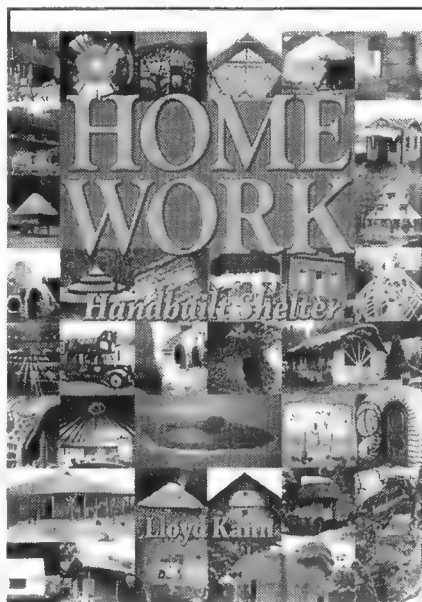
Which brings me to the very important information page on how to make the perfect rice puddings. I noticed none of the rice pudding recipes had egg in them. Not the traditional rice custards I'm used to, but absolutely yummy.

Try cheese risotto fritters with bacon and tomato. Learn how to make the perfect risotto (keep your stock on the simmer). Make rice ice-cream; try traditional English salmon and filo pie. The Thai and Malaysian recipes are mouth watering and your sushi will never be the same.

**Home Work
(Handbuilt Shelter)
by Lloyd Kahn
Published by Shelter
Publications**

**Large format, 245 pages,
full colour, soft cover
\$55.00 inc GST***

What an absolutely remarkable book. An American publication with a big outlook. Author Lloyd Kahn has been clever enough to combine his photographs and text with many other contributions from all over the world



to produce this feast of pictorial stories behind the simple handbuilt shelter.

It must have been difficult to know where to start with this book. Lloyd has obviously travelled far and wide to gather the varied stories for this book. Working on the principle of 'shelter is more than a roof overhead', the stories, faces and, most importantly, positive mood this book conveys are a triumph if not a publisher's nightmare!

Chapter headings read as follows: Builders, Homes, Natural Materials, Photographers (international contributions), Fantasy Trips, On The Road (mobile homes), Living Lightly, Barns and Old Buildings. That just about covers every climate, site situation and building material available to humanity. I was captivated by the barns. Some of the most classically beautiful constructions using mortice and tenon techniques are shown here. They are mostly powerless sites using traditional designs and local materials to produce very special buildings.

This book is jam-packed with beautiful photos as well as many line drawings making construction methods well understood. The book is a fantastic resource for any would be owner builder with a passion for creative design and natural materials. Timber, mudbrick, straw and stone — it's all here in its many shapes and terms. This truly is a remarkable publication and will go down as a landmark publi-

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cation in depicting the unique world of the owner builder. A must have. Beware, you will get lost in it for hours.

Practical Straw Bale Building

by Murray Hollis

Published by

Landlinks Press

Soft cover, A4, 98 pages,

black & white

\$29.95 inc GST*

As you would assume from a CSIRO publication this book roots itself in technical information. It is practical information made accessible to anyone wanting to learn the basics of straw-bale construction for both loadbearing and infill walls.

When building with straw it's essential that your bales are right to begin with. This means more than just choosing uniform dry bales. Storing your bales correctly on site is essential. It is always safe to assume that it will rain at least once before you have finished building your walls, so you should be prepared to cover your bales. A heavy duty tarp is best, making sure that all the bales are covered — not just the top. Wet

bales can lengthen your building time enormously.

Use this book to understand the materials and tools you will need. Learn about stacking, tying and straightening your walls. Murray goes in to a fair bit of technical stuff when it comes to renders (plasters). He looks at the three methods: lime, earthen and cement. I must admit I did find this section a little heavy going. Perhaps a bit too much chemistry and not enough mud slinging. Read about waterproofing, plumbing openings and drywall finishes. Don't forget those beautiful curved outside walls and creative shapes as well.

This book is all about facts and practical information. Perhaps some more photos and diagrams would have made it a little less dry, however combine it with your creative drive and you might find yourself living in a house of straw.

The Handmade Loaf by Dan Lepard

Published by

Mitchell Beazley

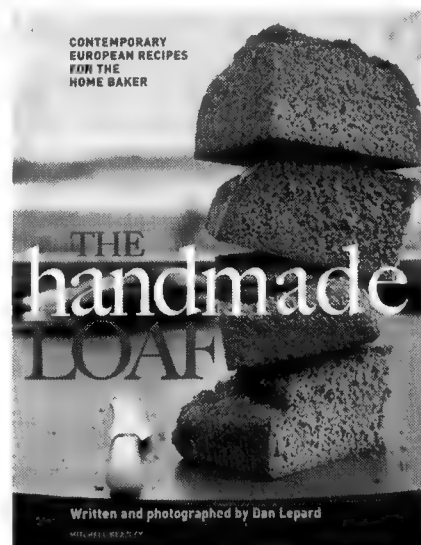
Large format, full colour,

hard cover, 192 pages

\$49.95 inc GST*

This book takes the simple art of bread baking and turns it into a gloriously beautiful spectacle. With over 80 recipes from Europe and loads of sumptuous photographs this book is much more than a recipe book: the social culture, process and kitchen setting of the bread baking are all superbly presented here, rather than just a dry list of recipes like most bread books. Author, Dan Lepard, is a very popular baker from Britain who obviously has an eye for texture and people interest as his photographs demonstrate. Dan says in his bag of baker's tools there is no instrument more useful or adaptable than his own two hands.

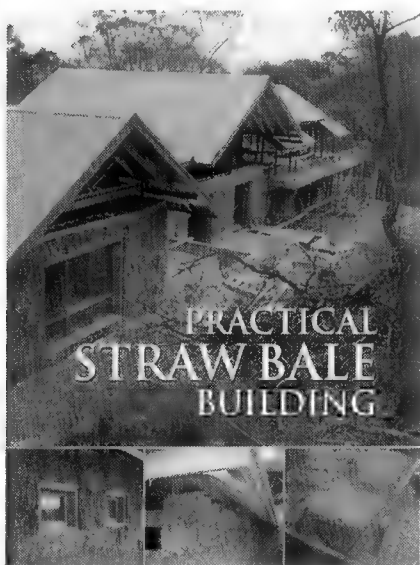
This book is a journey through the kitchens and bake houses of Europe.



Experience the skill and passion that is rolled up in the simple loaf. Start with the basics of understanding your flours, yeast and grains. Learn about mixing, shaping and baking. Create your own leaven and then you are away, baking specialities from Russia, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Scotland, France, England and Italy.

Try sage, cheese and shallot pie, or a traditional olive flat bread from Italy. Perhaps a rye loaf with coriander, or for the sweet tooth, a layered apple and custard loaf. All the recipes here are contemporary and use fabulous natural ingredients. Put the bread machine away for a while and meditate on the process of the handmade loaf.

***Books marked with an asterisk are available from The Good Life Book Club by phoning (03) 5424 1814 or by writing to:**
17 Falls Road,
Trentham, Victoria,
3458, for ordering details or a free catalogue.



MURRAY HOLLIS

EARTH GARDEN UNCLASSIFIEDS

Unclassifieds are 80 cents (including GST) per word prepaid.
Bookings for the SEPTEMBER 2005 issue should arrive at PO Box 2 Trentham, 3458,
by 1 AUGUST 2005 or <www.earthgarden.com.au>
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HOME PLANS. "The Earth Builders Plan Catalogue" (180 pages). includes: 92 plans for handcrafted buildings [83 homes & 9 workshops, cabin & carport] of mudbrick, rammed earth, stone, pole frame, timber, poured earth and strawbale (with construction details). Two working drawings for two homes are included: (11 x A3 sheets per working drawing). Mail \$125.00 (postage has been included) to John Barton Building Design, 89 Camden Road, Newtown, (Geelong) Vic. 3220 or phone (03) 5222 5774 with credit card details. Money orders & cheques accepted. Free brochure available. Individual home plans drafted & documented. Email: <jbarton@pipeline.com.au> Web: <http://users.pipeline.com.au/jbarton>.

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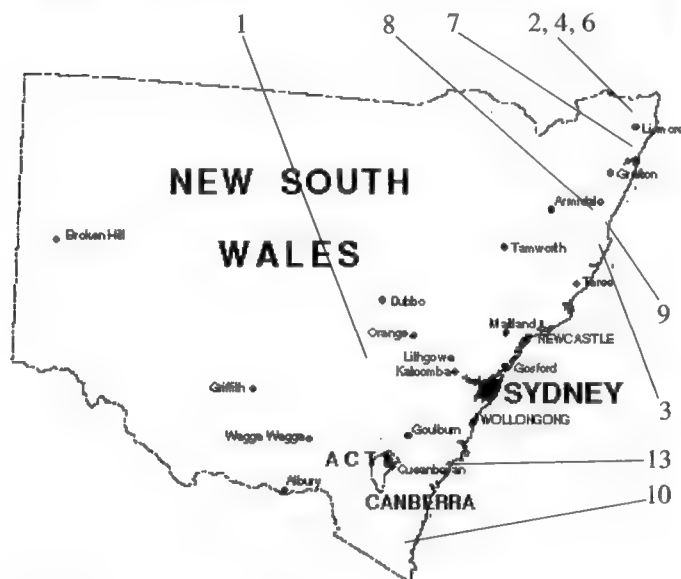
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5. NORTH-EAST NSW. Small/medium acreage, land only. Phone Dave or Melissa (07) 4038 1480. email: davemelissa@bigpond.com.



6. UNIQUE NEW TIMBER SOLAR HOME. Passive and Active solar design on Jarlanbah Permaculture Community, Nimbin, 1.5 km from village and 30 km west of Lismore. Open plan kitchen/living/dining with cathedral ceilings and polished floors. Natural light and breezes captured through central hexagon design. The hexagon has two wings: bedroom/bathroom & separate compost toilet on one side & large second bedroom or extra living room/study on the other. (Both these rooms carpeted). Jarlanbah offers a wildlife and people friendly relaxed lifestyle. Registered under Community Title the manageable half acre property is freehold. Electric power is via an underground grid system and the house has an interactive Solar Power System. Other features: Two 5,000 gal water tanks, solar hot water system, an extensive Council approved grey water system, ceiling fans and lots of fruit trees on a young permaculture garden. Jarlanbah has its own first response fire trailer and its own Community Centre building. \$249,000. Ring Brian on (02) 6689 1742. SEE PHOTO.



7. 320 ACRES between Grafton, Lismore and Evans Head beach - 1 hr from each, near Summerland Way. 35 minutes from Casino - friendly town with all amenities including hospital. No sprays or animals for 25 years. Large natural stands of tea tree - v high quality oil producers. Established organic garden with some fruit trees. modest but very functional and sound 3 bedroom house with verandah. Huge 12 x 9m high quality shed. new 5 x 5m studio. Big water tanks, never empty. electricity, gas, phone, new wood burning heater, 20 acres around house cleared, spring fed waterholes, flowing creek on boundary, beautiful bush, wonderful wildlife. Optional extra 960 acres of native forest with timber income potential — we have sustainable logging plan in place. Permission to build and to divide in half. This place has given us great gifts of peace and appreciation of the land. We love it but now returning to native NZ to retire. Price for 320 acres with house, etc is 320K. 960 acre forest is \$360,000. Ph: Pete on (02) 6661 7976.

8. UPPER BELLINGER VALLEY NATURE-LOVERS RETREAT. Secluded 2ha north-facing housesite with 1.12 share of established 420 ha multiple occupancy-(MO) on mid north coast. 90% of property boundary is rugged national park, which contains World Heritage-listed rainforest and declared wilderness areas. Featuring rainforest gullies, forested slopes, cleared creek flats and swimming holes, Bishops Creek certified organic MO is nestled along a permanent wilderness-fed major tributary of beautiful Bellinger River. Diverse native wildlife includes many species listed as threatened, and over 140 bird species many spectacular or uncommon. Cosy basic timber 2-1/2 room cabin (K/D/L & bedroom separated by screen-meshed breezeway) at this tranquil housesite adjacent to forest in hidden valley. Fuel stove for HW/cooking/heating, solar HW, 12V solar power, composting toilet, outside shower, phone line, fruit trees. Although completely private, the site is quite close to the main MO valley and community assets, including meeting house, pump, tractor, trailer, fruit trees. Bellinger a bit over half hour. \$160,000. Phone (02) 6655 1225.

9. BELLINGEN. 1/15 share in 165 acre MO in Thora Valley, bordering Bellinger River, 20 km from Bellingen. Lovely two bedroom home with stunning views. Fully certified biodynamic market garden, approx 1 1/2 acres beautiful fertile soil. 10' x 8' packing shed, propagating house and irrigation set up. \$255,000. Phone Bregje or Avi Danon on (02) 6655 8641, email danon@midcoast.com.au.

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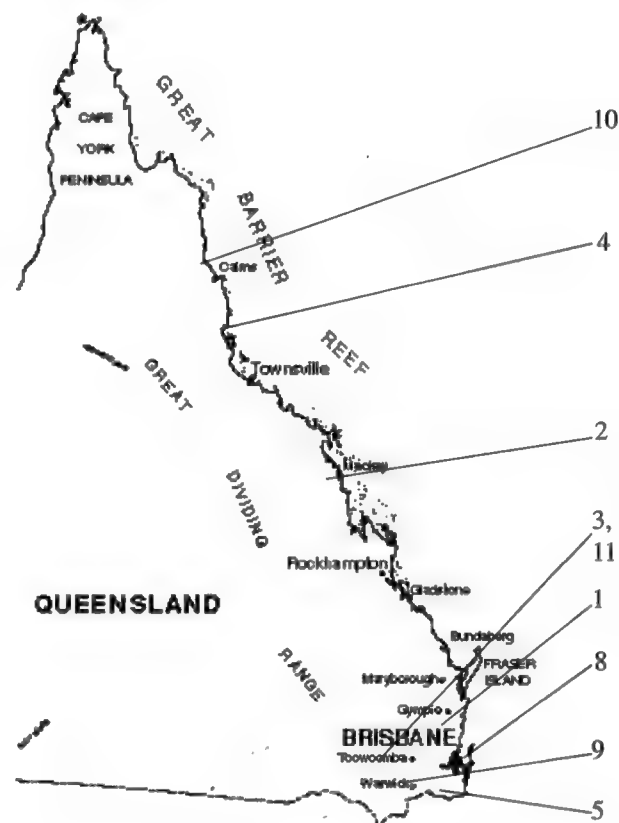
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11. DARLING DOWNS. 32 km n/w Tara. 61 acres 6 bedroom log cabin Queensland solar power mains power available phone septic slow combustion stove with HWS gas stove gas fridges established organic nursery gardens orchard small olive grove school bus mail. \$135,000 ONO, phone (07) 4669 2118.

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INTERESTED IN HOUSESITTING. Wondai area. Robert and Madonna Weaver, email: weave777@hotmail.com.

RETIRED CARPENTER HOUSE SITTER. Rob Lee, 5/92 Milton Street, Mackay, Qld, phone (07) 4957 4167.

QUEENSLAND HOUSE SITTERS. Daniel and Brook Clare, email: dclare_77@hotmail.com.

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1. GOLDEN VALLEY house and 21 acres (7 cleared and fenced, ringlock) near Deloraine. Alternative type timber 2 bed house, natural finishes, no chipboard. 700m mark edge of Western Tiers Wild Mountain Views. \$220,000. Phone (03) 6369 5494.



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3. NEAR LILYDALE, NORTHERN TASMANIA. (25 minutes from Launceston). Character country 3 bedroom house circa 1890 on about 4 acres. Renovated, private rural setting, study, country style kitchen, full central heating, plus large barn/workshop with mezzanine office/studio above. North facing slope, orchard, permanent creek, valley views. Offers early \$200,000. www.tassiehideaway.com Phone (03) 6395 1309.

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